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A MINOR CHORD

E. MITCHELL CHAPPLE

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THE BEQUEST OF

EVERT JANSEN WENDELL
(CLASS OF 1882)
OF NEW YORK

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To my dear friend
Irene Baldwin.
with best wishes -
Gratitude Justice
Chicago -
Aug - 7/95.

A STORY
OF A
PRIMA DONNA.

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THE MINOR CHORD:

A STORY OF A PRIMA DONNA.

BY

J. MITCHELL CHAPPLE

F. TENNYSON NEELY,
CHICAGO. Publisher: NEW YORK.
1895.

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THE MINOR CHORD.

CHAPTER I.

In the zenith of my career as a prima donna known to multitudes, I am alone. The glare of the footlights, the plaudits of audiences in both hemispheres, the praise of critics, the tokens of esteem and adoration of admirers—in spite of it all, I am lonely; my life is a minor chord.

How empty it all is!

Not long ago, a poor American girl! Now it seems as if there was nothing left to wish for, yet there is everything. No friend in whom I can confide and tell my heart's heart. My feelings have overcome me to-night, and I undertake a long-dreamt-of task.

My real life is too much threaded with commonplace to appear romantic. I started out with a deception, and now the real truth must never be known while my stage career lasts. No friend to sympathize with me! Although known everywhere, I am unknown, miserably unknown to those I have loved—loved and lost.

Authors have been busy for ages past dissecting and analyzing a woman's heart, in poetry, prose, and art;

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but authors mingle with their fellow-beings socially, and there is a great something always reserved, even from them, which is the only key to the soul. We keep back from husbands, fathers, sweethearts, that inexpressible something linked with the 'I am,' and carry it with us to the grave. My life has steeled me against some of the sublimest emotions, but they smolder still, and almost flash into a fire heat when I catch a reflection of my past life. I must express it!

Pen and paper are my confidants, and perhaps when I am dead, when my poor voice shall have joined in the songs of the immortal chorus, the critics will not be so harsh in their judgment of poor Minza. Hush! How strange that name sounds!

I make no apology for egotism. I know my powers, but I may not know all my weaknesses, and this is simply a communication between myself and my Maker. How trivial and infinitesimal all these petty struggles appear when one feels the Divine touch!

My manager would suggest that I should join the Salvation Army, if he knew that in the quiet of this night I have begun to pour out such soul secrets. His theory of life is that everything should startle and attract, and a poor, homely, honest Christian faith is hardly the thing for an opera prima donna.

But I must not linger.

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CHAPTER II.

I AM an American, and I'm proud of it, although I cannot claim a classic birthplace, rich in historical associations. In fact, I believe the stage biographer has sadly, but innocently perhaps, deceived the public. All this deception, and why? Not because of anything to blush for—no!

On the banks of a sluggish creek, in the miasma of a fever and ague bottom in Iowa, I'm told I was born. The house has since been torn down, but how dear to me is every bit of that prosaic little village! The familiar old grist mill, with its lazy water-wheel, where farmers brought their wheat to grind, and the dam which backed up the water of the creek making it a large shallow lake: this was to me in childhood as great as an ocean. The low rolling hills opposite appeared as mountains to childish fancy, but in later years the landscape seems to have shrunken; the grove of oaks, maples, elms, about the house which we used to love so well—we gave pet names from our history lessons to each tree—all were loved as human beings, and only 'old Napoleon' the walnut tree remains now to tell the story of childhood.

My early years were uneventful. Dear, kind

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father was a good man. He was English, and emigrated to America to make his fortune, and had married an American girl, proud, spirited, and beautiful, accomplished in music, art, and householdry. They settled in this little Iowa village to 'grow up' with the town. Father dreamed of large estates as in the 'old country,' for there is nothing an Englishman so dearly loves as a little plot of ground he can call his own, unless, perhaps, it is a racehorse. Father was industrious and thrifty. I was the first-born, and must have been a very troublesome baby, and mother used to say, 'There's one virtue Minza possesses—she's never idle.'

She left me alone one day while she went across the way to help a neighbor with a sick child, and the dough-pan, which was standing by the stove, full of bread dough, mixed and ready for kneading and baking, was too tempting for my artistic genius; and on her return she found the chairs, bureau, little old piano, and 'whatnot' judiciously plastered with the dough. I shall never forget the expression on her face. I remember this incident, because it is my first memory of a man who was largely responsible in forming my career.

Old Dr. Waddington it was who just then came in and saw my handiwork. He was a very large, stout man, weighing nearly three hundred pounds, and the original founder of the village. In fact, he had christened it 'Smithville' in honor of his former home in the Eastern States American towns, as a rule, do not possess particularly expressive and characteristic names for they grow and multiply so rapidly that it is rather

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difficult, as in the case of parents with a large family, to find names enough to go round.

He looked at me a minute, and said to mother:

'I think she had better be brought down to-morrow, as I have sent for Dr. Griffin to come up.'

I remember the shudder mother gave, and how she quickly lifted me up and kissed me.

'Will it—what do you think—Doctor, is there any danger?'

'My dear Mrs. Maxwell, I cannot tell. The case is very puzzling; but I have great faith in Dr. Griffin, and we will warn you in time should dangerous symptoms show themselves.'

Those were his words as nearly as I can remember. It was an anxious night, and father did not go to his business next morning, and when we started out he carried me in his arms, which I thought unusually kind of him. When danger threatens, how dearly parents love their children! He hugged me tightly, and mother carried wee baby Joe, as we went to the photographer's; and when we entered the dressing-room to prepare for the picture, mother burst into tears.

'O Robert! how can we permit it?'

The scene was like that of a funeral. I remember how the pretty little imitation stumps and trees for the background amused me; the scenery was one of those primitive daubs that are to be found in nearly all picture galleries in the States.

The photographer was a long time preparing his plates, and shut himself up in his little dark room as if at his devotions. I was placed in front of the group, between father and mother. A forked iron rack was

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placed at the back of my head to hold me still. The little bald-headed photographer seemed to enjoy diving in and out from under the black cloth.

Finally, the camera artillery was ready. With a rattle-box to keep baby Joe quiet, and with his watch in the other hand, and the scorching sun pouring down upon the scenic effect through the white cloth, in that Iowa country photographer's studio my first picture was taken. My hair was combed back smooth, and held by an arched comb, and tied with a blue ribbon behind. Oh, how clearly it all comes back to me now, as I sit and cry over that old faded tin-type!

After the picture had been taken I was carried over to the little old red office of Dr. Waddington. A tall man in an apron and spectacles was with him. He had a large number of knives, saws, and sharp instruments spread out on the window-sill. There was a long narrow table in the center of the room. With the ghastly motion of an executioner, the strange man, pointed to the table. and mother began to cry. Baby Joe joined, and father's eyes were filled. He sat me down gently. They all kissed me, including the fat old doctor. I still felt mother's arms about me, and I was not afraid. It seemed a good deal of fuss to make over a little red-headed girl. A few minutes later I was unconscious. The test of life and death was being made. I was tongue-tied. The operation was to remove a dangerous growth in my throat, the throat and voice which have since won me fame.

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CHAPTER III.

THE operation was successful. My tongue was loosed, and at six years of age I learned to talk. What happiness it brought! Dear father seemed more fond of me than ever, and his whole life centered in 'little red-headed Meg.'

He was a country merchant, and kept a general merchandise store, to which the farmers would come every Saturday from miles round to obtain needed supplies in exchange for their butter and eggs and other produce. How well I remember that dear old place! Its very odor was wholesome. Every factory or shop has its peculiar atmosphere, characteristic only of that particular branch of trade; but the old 'store', as we called it, seemed to be a composite of everything, from brown sugar and green cheese to molasses and strong-smelling onions.

As it was the largest shop in the village, father and mother were looked upon as the most prominent persons. Our piano was about the only one in the hamlet, and mother's playing and singing were noted far and near; indeed, she would often entertain the neighbors of an evening. Part of her religion was to make others happy.

Another baby brother came about a year after that

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first family group was taken. I took charge of baby Jimmy, as we named him, so that mother might give all her attention to little Joe, who had always been sickly.

It was in those days that mother first began to instruct me in music. I loved it then. How well I remember awaking every morning with mother playing 'The Maiden's Prayer' or Schumann's 'Jolly Farmer' on the piano! These two selections had a history, and father never left home in the morning without mother playing them. He was not a musician, but loved music even more passionately than do some who are accomplished in the art.

These were happy days; and as father used to sit and smoke his pipe, with one baby on each knee and his red-headed Meg cosily stowed away between, and his arm about dear mother, he certainly looked the happiest and most contented mortal on earth. It was a happy family picture such as no artist has ever yet successfully painted. But it is during these happy lulls in life that the crash comes.

America is a country of crashes and climaxes. It is a new country, and develops more rapidly than its financial resources; consequently, its history is well peppered with bubbles and panics. It was during one of these panics that my father failed in business. Not through any fault of his own; but he had endorsed a bill for a friend, who could not pay it, and he was compelled to do so. Coming at a time when he had a large amount of accounts outstanding and securities upon which he could not realize, father turned over to

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the Shylock creditors all his property, worth many times his liabilities, for them to prey upon and divide the spoils.

Never can I forget that night in June when he came home to tea, but could not eat. With a deep yearning gaze he looked across the table at mother, and burst into tears.

'Helen, I'm ruined!' he cried.

'How is that, Robert?' said mother quietly, going to him and throwing her arms about his neck. This was her favorite way of asking questions. He told her the story in detail as simply as a little child.

'Still, it may not be so bad after all, Robert. I will go down to the store with you after tea, and we will see.'

Mother knew nothing of business matters, but was a woman for emergencies. There was no further eating, and we went to the store. It was after closing hours, and the curtains had been drawn—upon which my father's name blazed in large gilt letters, which seemed now like a mockery.

Once inside, we went to the long sloping desk, and there mother developed hidden powers. The little, shrinking, timid woman seemed to comprehend the situation after examining the books and accounts.

'Well, Robert, it is cruel, it is wrong; but they must take the property.'

'O my poor wife and children!' burst out father in tears.

'Yes, but we can save our home; that is exempt,' replied mother.

'But, Helen, is that honest when—when——'

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'Robert, your first duty is to yourself and family; you must not assume that all men are as honest as you are. Robert, I say we will refuse to give up our home.'

There was a queenly firmness in this. The light aud fire in her eye was like that of an aroused tigress defending her young.

We saved the home, but the lawyers soon made sad havoc of the property. The 'assignee sale' only realized, or rather was reported to have realized, a small fraction of its real value, and left father still 'one thousand dollars' in debt.

'One thousand dollars!' I dreamed of them that night. What an enormous sum it seemed! My poor father! His face grew thin and he began to stoop, and I would have given my life to have secured that one thousand dollars. Could I sew? Could I grow big and go out teaching? But how long it would take to save one thousand dollars to lift the pall that hung over our household! I wished I were a big girl, and could marry a rich man.

But something must be done. Father, a few days ago the prosperous village merchant, had now but few friends who could help him.

He tried to find work as a builder—the trade he had learnt in England; but no one would build houses in panic times, and finally, with a saw-buck on his shoulder, this noble father, this true Knight of Manhood, sawed a neighbor's wood-pile to buy his family flour.

That cord of wood nearly cost father his life. It was a cold, rainy day, and he worked in his shirt-

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sleeves, and, not being accustomed to manual labor, he caught a heavy cold. I had been with him to help pile up the wood as he sawed it. We had retreated behind a hay-stack from public view, so there was just a bit of pride left. How I hated everyone then! I really believe I was an Anarchist in spirit.

That night we sat alone without a light.

'Helen, what can we do, what can we do? appealed father, with that soft, beseeching look which expressed so much. His cough was growing harder.

'Something will come to us, Robert,' replied mother. 'Never mind; we shall live somehow. Be patient, Robert, be patient.'

As is often the case, calamity had reversed the position of the two. Mother was now commander of the struggling home-craft.

She went to the piano, and played softly impromptu chords as she used to play them on the little wheezy church organ, then 'The Maiden's Prayer.' Afterwards she started to sing the old melody, 'Nellie Gray.' How sweet and soothing it was! No voice have I ever heard like mother's. In the middle of the third verse she stopped short.

'I delare I've forgotten the words, Robert.'

She lighted a lamp to search among the pile of music on the top of the piano, and while so doing she found a worn piece of sheet music. It was Mendelssohn's 'Wedding March,' and she started.

'Robert, we're all right!'

The sight of that piece of music had brought to mind her wedding, and a wedding present.

'Robert, I have property.'

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'What can it be? You never told me.'

'I never told you, my dear; but dear father gave me a deed belonging to some wild land in the western part of the State as a wedding present. I have the deed.'

'But you have never paid the taxes.'

'I know—not for several years; and the land may not be worth much; but we shall see.'

She sat down at once, and wrote to a lawyer in the town nearest to the land. We all studied the map in my little School Geography, but it gave us little idea of its value or location.

We waited anxiously for a reply; and after several days it arrived. The lawyer gave a most discouraging report of the land, saying that it was fifty miles from a railroad, and that it had been sold for taxes, and would require a large amount of money to redeem it and secure a clear title; also, that the panic had effected that section very much, but that possibly he might clear three hundred dollars if a power of attorney were sent him to sell it at once.

A family consultation was held over our frugal meal of bread and cheese that night. Winter was coming on. Something must be done, and quickly.

Three hundred dollars! That was a large sum of money.

'We should accept it, Robert,' said mother at last, after long reflection.

That settled it.

'My plan is to re-invest that money in a music and book shop here in the village, and I will teach music

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in order to sell the instruments. That is what we must do, Robert.'

'My dear Helen, with your babies and you so delicate in health, and——'

'Never mind, dear, we shall manage somehow; you and Meg can attend the store and the household work, and I will teach.'

My mother's wedding present was sold. The land proved, ten years after, to be coal land worth nearly a million dollars when the railroad reached it, and it made the fortunes of several men. But that three hundred dollars invested in a stock of violins, guitars, strings, trimmings, sheet music, and books, was another link which determined my career.

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CHAPTER IV.

We were soon established in business. Our music and book shop was on one side of the room occupied by the village post-office. Mother organized a music class, and, although the income was small, through the commissions on the sale of an occasional piano or a violin to a country-dance fiddler we managed to live comfortably.

But we were poor, and that thousand dollars still remained unpaid, and father's creditors even tried to seize the little business which gave us a livelihood. However, mother was too shrewd for them. She had established the firm name of 'Maxwell & Co.,' with herself as principal and father as 'Co.' This baffled the creditors; but it worried poor father as being dishonest, and he began to fail. The dumb ague fastened its grip upon him, and every other day he had a 'shake' or chill. While mother was out teaching he was at home doing the housework, washing, ironing, cooking, and tending Joe; while Jimmy was with me at the little store, sucking his bottle and sleeping in the perambulator behind the counter. It was the confinement to the house that told on father. Men were not made for housekeepers.

When music and selling musical instruments

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became our means of livelihood I began to hate it. Why should my mother have to earn her living that way? Other girls did not need to play fiddles and amuse country bumpkins in order to make a few pence. I grew to hate music, so much so that mother found it difficult to teach me the rudiments. Oh, the long dreary five-finger exercises and scales! I was so proud when she permitted me to play the little 'Bee March.' That seemed more like music. She looked after me carefully, and would not allow me to sing in the school, which I thought a hardship; but with a mother's intuition she realized how important it was to train a voice when yonng, and to-day I do not believe my natural voice was anything extraordinary, but that mother's care had much to do with giving me the strength to endure the severe discipline of after years.

For some years mother had given her services as organist in the Methodist Church, towards the construction of which father had contributed one thousand dollars. I confess, as I sat in the choir, just behind the dear old minister, Sunday after Sunday, I often thought I would like to tear out that thousand dollars from those dingy walls. But to me that dear old church has tender recollections: a tall, slender spire, adorned by a lightning rod; green blinds about the square cupola, out from which the rich tone of the bell resounded; the old grayhaired sexton, who used to let me hold the rope while it raised me toward the roof; the small class-room just off the main entrance; on the other side, the stairs to the gallery, where we children used to play when the 'mite socials' were held—the cheerful savor of coffee and sandwiches comes back to me

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now. The interior was painted a light but dismal brown. The windows were imitations of old Norman arches with eyebrow arches of a deeper brown just above. The pews were plain, and the old and deaf people of the congregation used to occupy those in front, while the tittering and sniggering youngsters cluster in the rear. It was on a hot Communion Sunday in June that the first link in my musical career was forged. All strangers were exhorted to join in this service. Father and mother were kneeling, and I was left at the organ to sing a verse each time, as the people came forward and knelt about the pulpit platform.

Alone I sang—

'Just as I am, without one plea,
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidd'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come.'

When I saw father and mother kneeling together at that table, and remembered that they had never attended a class or prayer meeting, or had family prayers at home, it thrilled me.

To this day I have never taken Communion publicly, but on that Sunday, I think I closed my eyes and sang straight to God in soul communion.

The last 'I come' was fading away, and I was almost unconscious of the presence of others. I opened my eyes suddenly, and saw two blue eyes, raised above the altar rail, which met mine. I started and gasped aloud. The minister turned about quickly and looked over his spectacles; the service stopped. Mother and father started towards me, thinking I was ill. I blushed

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a deep red, made deeper by the sunshine pouring through the stained-glass windows. I had made a scene in church. The owner of those blue eyes was a stranger. He was evidently a commercial traveler, and was staying at Francis's Hotel. I was only a homely little red-headed girl, and it was rather unusual for me to attract an admiring glance.

I confess I fell in love; but those blue eyes fascinated me. Of course it was silly in a girl of nine years, but there was a touch of affinity in that glance that I cannot explain. I did not become acquainted with him that day, but I found out secretly that he came from the big city of Boston, far, far away from Iowa. The church music of the period was rather peculiar. Mother loved a solemn, rich harmony that expresses reverence and adoration, such as is used in the English Church service; but in every church, in every society, religious or civic, no matter whether great or small, there is sure to be a quarrel among factions at one time or another.

Mother's taste was questioned by some of the ladies whom she had been teaching. The flashy gospel hymns, with their bumpty-bump, three-chord jiggy airs, had turned their heads.

'They be so truly passionate,' wailed old spinster Brown; 'and express real great music,' she continued, wringing her hands.

Mother had given her a scolding at her last lesson for not learning the five-finger exercises properly, as she would persist in playing with her thumbs, one note at a time.

It was a storm in a teacup, to be sure. Mother

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was firm, and would tolerate no nonsense. The kind old minister sided with mother, but the majority of the congregation followed Squire Bumps, the leading trustee, who had become wealthy by foreclosing mortgages on poor people, and prayed and roared like a mad bull in class meeting for forgiveness of his sins.

To me he was a hypocrite, and he certainly wanted his daughter Grace to sing in my place.

The final result was that mother was asked to resign her thankless task, and we walked out of the church the following Sunday with suppressed sobs—out of the church my father had almost built; a church that held in its walls enough to relieve him from debt; a church for which he had given time and energy in prosperity—but from which he was driven out in adversity.

Do you wonder at the opposition offered to Church work? Too often it is used in the interests of social and financial cliques, and true worship is forgotten.

'Well, the Kingdom of God is big enough for us all,' said mother, as we sat down to dinner that day.

In spite of this galling incident, I thank Heaven I never lost a pure and simple faith in God. It is true I cannot fathom theological dogma, but hovering about me always is the Great and Good God to whom I pray. My theological belief may be accounted heretical by some, but it is simple faith, and a personal belief that concerns only my Maker and myself.

For a time after the crushing affair at the church,

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we thought of leaving the town altogether, but plucky mother insisted :

'No, we will yet see the turn of the tide.'

It did not take long, either.

The shop business was poor, though mother's energy had made her successful as a teacher; but success always brings its penalty in the way of jealousy and envy. It was thought she was using her position as organist in church to secure more scholars; but they drew closer to her with unswerving loyalty, and the class kept on increasing until she began to stagger under the strain.

Father insisted that he would starve rather than let her keep on without a rest, and a serious consultation was held, at which he suggested a concert to close the term—something that would be a substitute for the Sunday-school concerts which had been given at the church, under mother's direction, once every month.

The new organist at the church had tried the concerts and failed. Then mother commenced planning for the recital. It was very elaborate and bold in conception, considering the material she had to deal with. Bless her heart ! she was so magnetic. It was from this first recital that I drifted into a stage career.

The Town Hall was generously lent to her; an impromptu stage was built, and bed linen was brought into requisition for curtains. All day long father was at work filling an array of bottles with atred fluid, to furnish the red lights by placing lamps behind them.

How I hated that first concert ! My mother and father in the show business ! It stung my pride. The

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rehearsals went on actively, and mother concentrated every energy upon the preparations. She understood human nature, and so assigned the various parts as to help on the work. Hours and hours she spent drilling me in Leonora's arias from Verdi's 'Trovatore.' I was locked in a room to practice the violin, as I was to shine as a veritable prodigy in music. Oh, how heartsick I was as the date approached! Could it not be postponed? Could I hide? There was only one thing that held me close to duty. My red-headed nature asserted itself. If my mother *was* in the 'show business,' and if my father *did* attend to the babies and wash dishes and was called 'Poor Hen-pecked Bob,' the Sunday-school concert should be outdone.

All great works are achieved through rivalry. We must make some effort in order to learn our own strength.

And so I made my real *debut.*

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CHAPTER V.

NEVER can I forget that first recital. It was a few days past my tenth birthday. The hour for beginning was eight o'clock, but, as is usual with home entertainments, it was well past nine o'clock when the curtain sheets were drawn aside.

Father stood at the door taking the money for admission. Beside him, on a buffalo robe, were the two babies, Joe and Jim, in their new white dresses. I had shrunk out of sight from some of the schoolboy chums, who, I was afraid, would jeer me. Father wore a paper dicky over a rough flannel shirt, and looked quite a gentleman with one of mother's blue ribbons for a necktie. He had dressed me before taking his station at the door, carefully curling my red hair and trying to powder away some of the freckles.

'On you, my precious little sweetheart, it all depends,' he said, kissing me, with moist eyes.

There was not a very large attendance, but Squire Bumps' family, and the Blixons, and all the enemy in the church quarrel, turned out in full force. I fancied I saw knives and blades under their skirts. Grace Bumps, who had taken my place in the church choir, swept by me with a supercilious air which stung me;

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and then, how glad I was the concert was to be given! My natural ire was roused.

Cool and collected behind those improvised curtains, which revealed to the audience pantomimic shadows of those who took part, was mother. Clad in a simple muslin dress, lowered just a trifle at the neck, with flowers at her throat and in her hair, it seemed to me that I had never before seen my mother so beautiful. Her dark blue eyes were flashing with excitement. Two tall, gawky country boys stood at each side of the centre curtains to pull them aside.

What a breathless moment of suspense it was just before mother gave the signal! The young lads, who were admitted free as ushers, were stationed in different parts of the room. They turned down the lamps at the signal. The lights behind the red bottles were turned on by father in the rear of the room, and then, in the hush of darkness, the soft strains of 'Swanee River' were sung without instrumental accompaniment by the chorus behind the scenes.

The effect was thrilling. Mother's clear, beautiful voice led the chorus of boys and girls. It was something unexpected, and that always pleases.

The last strains of the plaintive plantation melody had scarcely died away when, prompt on the tap of the bell, two of the most advanced pupils dashed into the piano duet 'Poet and Peasant,' with mother standing over them to turn the music and count the time—one, two, three, four—in a soft undertone. Of course that music is now out of date. Musical taste varies with each generation; but it seems to me that no orchestration ever gave such a finished conception as that sim-

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ple piano duet—every retard and crescendo given with precision. How I pity the millions of young girls nowadays who spend years and years of hard study on the pianoforte—and every girl must play the piano! When an amateur piano selection is announced on a concert programme there is a suppressed yawn floating over the audience. Piano-playing is so common, and in these days it is more of finger gymnastics than a feeling and soulful interpretation of music. A collocation of sounds is not real music—there must be a soul-fire at the back of it.

My heart fluttered when the accelerando of the last measures in that duet was reached, and the crash chords and explosive octaves were struck, which is the conventional method of concluding a piano selection. I was next on the programme, and gently picked for the last time the A and E strings to see if my violin was in tune. The sea of faces and light before me was confusing. Not a feature did I recognize.

'Keep cool and go slowly,' whispered mother, as she played the introduction to Mendelssohn's 'Consolation.'

I drew the bow for the first phrase with my fingers giving every note a terrible shake and tremolo. After the first full down-bow, I felt the passion of the music —forgot those in front—and half closed my eyes. It is a simple piece; my fourth finger was usually awkward, but now it seemed as free and unconscious as breath itself, so that I put all my soul into the bowing. The last phrase, which expresses the whole piece, and is Mendelssohn's favorite musical expression, died away under a light bow slowly drawn, until

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the tone almost faded into the breathless silence of the room.

I sat down without a ripple of applause, and I felt crushed as I walked behind the sheet curtain. Mother rushed in and kissed me passionately.

'O my darling little Meg! so beautiful—so touching!' She kissed me over and over again, and the programme stopped for a moment. What a light heart those kisses gave me! It pleased mother, it was she for whom I played. Our greatest achievements are not to please the world, but that little circle we love. In after years I very often find myself straining every nerve to please one person in the audience, and when I feel the response after my first tones I am satisfied—no matter what the applause may be, or what critics may say.

The next number was 'The Storm,' which, with its vivid mimicry and Alpine song, mother played on the piano, and it created a wild outburst of applause. It was brilliant, and just the thing to suit a country audience.

'By jinks, I thought the rain war a-comin' on the roof!' whispered one large, lank farm-hand, as he squirted tobacco juice in the corner. Mother had captured the audience. My next piece was a vocal solo, the aria 'Ah! I have sighed to rest me!' from 'Trovatore.' Mother had an impromptu orchestra arranged, which she had been rehearsing for weeks. The red-headed cornetist and country-dance fiddler, Jack Robins, were playing their parts more by ear than note. The orchestra score differed somewhat from the vocal part. The first note I shaded

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with a full robust chest tone, soft and sustained, which I have always loved since, and which is considered one of my greatest powers as a singer. The bass viol missed several changes, but hastily corrected himself. It started out well. I felt that responsive approval from the sea of faces in front, but in the second part, when I was growing most passionate—a sort of childish mimic passion taught me by mother—the poor red cornetist came in on the wrong measure, and the confusion quite upset the entire orchestra. The fiddler squeaked, the bass lost his place, and it ended in a crash—a break-down! I caught mother's flashing eye. There was a titter about the room. Quickly mother motioned the orchestra to cease, and striking in on the introduction with that firm passionate touch which inspires, she said in an undertone:

'Begin over again.'

I did so—only mother and I. The failure nerved me with stronger power. The song was finished and the applause was deafening, the audience appreciating mother's pluck more than they did the song, and we were encored several times.

Squire Bumps and his wife arose and left just then, as if to mortify father at the door.

The concert concluded in a blaze of triumph with the Hallelujah Chorus' from Handel's 'Messiah.'

After the programme the mothers came forward for their little girls who had taken part in it, and mother was overwhelmed with congratulations. There is a sort of air about after the performance that throws a glare over the performer which interests the audience.

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Mother had vanquished her rival; and the Sunday-school concerts were laid low.

It was the old Squire who remarked a few days afterwards:

'Wal, I told you that woman was a-leadin' our church into theatrical temptations. See that concert —a disgrace, sir! Full of jig songs and evil ways. No, sir, keep our sanctuary pure.'

After the concert, we picked up little Joe and baby Jim, who were asleep, and carried them home.

'Robert, I am proud of Meg,' mother said.

'My own little sunbeam!' said father, taking me on his shoulder.

The evening's events were talked over at the fireside until past midnight. Even after we retired I heard mother and father still talking it over. Little Jim hugged closer to me. It all seemed like a dream, and the echoes of the music rang in my ears.

'Fred Burroughes was there to-night,' said father softly.

I had not seen him.

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CHAPTER VI

AFTER the first concert the reputation of mother as a music teacher was established.

Father's health did not improve, and old Dr. Waddington shook his head and said he must leave the ague district. This required money, and the thousand dollars of debt seemed as large as ever. Mother struggled on with her lessons.

'One—two—three—four.' I can see her yet in the old parlor at the side of a scholar, going through hours and hours of drudgery in teaching for a livelihood.

On a cool October day at noon I was near the old brick school-house, standing under the tall cottonwood trees. The children were playing among the rustling sea of fallen leaves. The trees were shedding their flakes of snowy fur; the air was laden with shouts of childish merriment, with now and then an unearthly Indian yell: children without noise are not children. It was one of those perfect autumn days to which a memory of past events will so easily fix itself.

From across the road came a form I knew well, although I had never spoken a word to him.

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'This is Minza Maxwell, I know,' he said softly, and his clear blue eyes made me blush furiously. The girls all looked at us in shy wonderment.

'Yes, sir, that's me,' I replied, walking apart from the other girls.

'Well, Minza, I want you to become a great singer.'

It was rather abrupt.

'What am I to do?' I asked coyly, hardly daring to look up into his face.

'Your father is going to Boston with me on business, and will be gone three months. You must go with him and study music.'

It seems that it had all been arranged at home, and was no news to them when I arrived. Father was being sent away by his brother Masons for his health, and I was to look after him, and Mr. Burroughes had arranged for the music lessons in Boston.

Have you ever been at the first home-breaking of a little family? Now that we were going, it brought back the memories recalled by that little photograph group of which I have already spoken. Like Cinderella, I had dreamed of a handsome rich lover to pay that thousand dollars debt. My first love was Fred Burroughes. Although I was a little girl and he quite a young man, gratitude filled my heart with the deepest admiration for the blue-eyed commercial traveler whom I had first seen over the altar-rail at Communion service in the little brown church.

I had a loving girl companion. Angela Gooding lived across the road, and a pretty little thing she was. True, we had our little quarrels when out berrying or

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picking up hickory nuts, or playing in the sandpile under the old maples, or swinging in the cherry trees near the old red barn. But yet we loved each other. Our secrets were as one. We make our truest friends in childhood, because a child makes friends from disinterested motives.

The night before I was to leave, Angela and I wandered down to the old deserted limekiln, where we had spent so many happy days together, and built fairy castles in the air. I said good-bye and kissed even the large flat old stones where we used to sit and watch the stars. It was here, with the shadows of the afternoon sun playing through the leaves of the old walnut tree, that Angela and I had read Sir Walter Scott's novels and thought of the tumbled stones of the kiln as ancient ruins.

We cried because we thought that perhaps we should never be together again. We plighted our eternal friendship with rings made of withered blades of grass. The hidden hemp fish-poles were brought out and put away again, and over the wire fence Farmer Brown's muley cow 'Spotty' looked pensively as if for a good-bye kiss.

In the house I threw off my jacket and cried as mother asked me to try on a new coat with shining buttons. In our poverty, mother had made my jackets out of father's faded and worn-out coats, and dyed them in logwood. The black persisted in wearing off on my neck, and the boys used to plague me with cries of 'Charcoal Meg.' How I hated that name! But Angela never plagued me. I longed for the time to throw that jacket away, for even a homely girl loves

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to appear pretty. But now, when I could abandon it, how dear it seemed!

'Mamma, let me stay, and you go with papa,' I remember pleading.

'No, a little girl of mine could hardly do that,' softly said mamma. 'You go with papa and study hard, and then you will be someone some day and not have to endure poverty. Be somebody, Minza!'

She kissed me again. She was not an effusive mother; her kisses were few, but always appropriate. She did not humor me by waiting on my every wish or tucking me in bed, with the other usual incidents of expressing a mother's love, but taught me self-reliance and breathed in me an ambition that I could not quench.

It was a sad night. Nearly all night I lay crying. The rain fell in torrents; I was afraid of the deluge which we had read about in our last Sunday-school lesson, and rushed into mother's room in a fright. I soon fell asleep when father's arms were about me. I dreamed that I should never see little Joe and baby Jim again. How cruel, I thought, to drive me away now!

The next day was a busy one with packing. The train left at midnight. We tried to spend a cheerful evening, and Angela was allowed to stay up with me. The hour of twelve seemed to come too quickly. The 'bus rattled to the door with its dingy light in front. Once more I broke out, 'I will not go. Mamma—mamma, I cannot leave you and the babies.'

'Come, Minza dear, mamma will be all right. That's a good girl, take care of papa and be some-

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body, Minza, be somebody!' She kissed me good-bye as only a mother can. Father hugged me close to him. We were off to Boston. It seemed like an exile to Siberia.

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CHAPTER VII.

THAT journey was before the days of through train service such as we have in America now. It was change cars often, and change roads oftener, and long waits for connections. At one junction I read all the placards several times sideways and upside down.

When we reached Chicago all was bustle. The trip already seemed to put new life into father. It was his day for an ague chill and he missed it.

The State Street cable cars, gliding along without any horses or engines, were the first things to attract my attention. The beautiful waves of Lake Michigan were dancing in the morning sunlight. The dome of the old Exposition building, since then removed, was awe-inspiring. The trains shooting along the lake front, with their wide funnel smoke stacks, seemed like busy messengers from another world. There was a wild rushing air of business only known in Chicago.

On to Boston we journeyed. We could not afford sleeping cars, and father arranged a bed for me on the seats, but did not sleep himself. The nearer we approached Boston, the straighter the people sat in their seats; for the pretty little crooked streets of Boston have, to all Americans, a classic fascination. They are about the only evidences we have left of

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European settlement in America. The grand old Boston commons, with the towering elms, brought before me visions of the Revolutionary war, which I had been reading over in my school history.

We traveled across the ferry to Cambridge, passed the old Washington elm and Longfellow's beautiful home, buried in the trees, and stopped at a low, narrow grey house with green blinds and an enormous brass knocker, which was to me quite an object of curiosity.

A tall, kindly-looking lady with a long face, which struck my childish fancy as looking like our old horse at home, came to the door.

'Miss Paxton, I believe?' said my father.

'Yes, sir; and this is Mr. Maxwell, I believe; and is this Minza? Come here, my dear.'

She was evidently a spinster, and tried to look very kind and pleasant, but she was not a mother. Only a mother can win a child at once. She untied the strings of my hood.

'Yes, this is Helen's only daughter, and she——'

'Oh, you know mamma!' I broke in. Even an association of acquaintance inspires confidence, and I came closer to her.

'Yes, my dear, I knew your mamma when she was a little girl like you.'

'Yes, it was hard for Helen, but she has great hopes of Minza,' continued father.

'I dare say.'

'Now I must be going. Minza, be a good girl and mind Miss Paxton. Good-bye, dear.'

He kissed me tenderly, and I broke out in rebellion.

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'I will not stay! Mamma said I was to go with papa.'

'But I shall come back, dear.'

I again had a good cry; it seemed as if all the world were against me. An exile from home—alone with strangers!

A few days after, I began my lessons. The Professor was a big, kind-looking man, with hazel whiskers, and I used to think what a nice place it would be for the sparrows to nest in. I soon learned to like Professor Windermere, although he never considered me a promising pupil. He was a prudent teacher, and my vocal exercises were given with experienced care. Oh, how long those scales seemed, going uphill and down, breathing like a machine! How I would stop and cry, thinking of mother and the babies at home! How I envied the little girls in the streets selling papers and matches! They were free, with no scales to practice. No songs could I sing, although my heart was hungry for melody. Miss Paxton's keen but kind eye seemed upon me night and day. As the days wore on I became more reconciled, but my thoughts were always away in that little Iowa town. We feel more at home as we become acquainted with the landscape, and when the street-car conductor with spectacles called me by my Christian name, I felt that I knew nearly everyone in Boston.

One morning, about a year after, I came down to breakfast, after having had a loitering play with Pussy, my confidant, and found Miss Paxton crying. A canary in the bay window was singing gaily in the morning sunlight, as if to dispel her grief.

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On the table was that yellow envelope with black letters which augurs ill. It was a telegram.

'My dear, you will have to go home—to-day.'

'What's the matter? Is mamma——'

'No, no, my child, but your mother wants you at home.'

'My papa——'

'He has gone home, and is much better.'

This did not dispel my forebodings. At noon Fred Burroughes arrived, and I returned with him. My mind was so absorbed with fears of something wrong that I quite forgot my companion; indeed, I remember very little of the return journey—I don't even remember bidding dear Miss Paxton good-bye. The train never seemed to go fast enough.

At length we neared Smithville. When the train whistled, how my heart leaped! The rattle across the old railway bridge brought me one bit nearer. My nose was pressed against the car window, as the lights in the village twinkled a welcome. Our home was at the end of the street, and I saw the light in the window glimmering like a lighthouse in a harbor. I imagined a death-bed scene; my eyes were filled with tears. Out of the 'bus' I jumped, and rushed in.

'Mother, mother!' I cried. She was not there. Could it be? My father grasped and kissed me.

'Mother, mother!' I again cried wildly.

'Here, Minza,' cried a weak familiar voice in another room.

I hurried into the darkened room and smothered that pale, wan face with kisses.

'Another brother, Minza,' said father; and then in

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the dim light I saw the little red face with eyes closed on the other side of the bed. I was angry.

'Mother, mother,' I cried, 'I didn't want any more brothers.'

'Hush; my child,' she whispered.

Father had tea ready, but I could not eat until I had awakened little Joe and Jim, who were sleeping together in a cot.

'Oo's 'ittle sisser, Meddie. Oo's nice sisser. Sisser's dot oder buzza.' The little fellow's eyes sparkled; and how precious his little form seemed in that long nightdress! Baby Jim was quite a boy, and hardly knew me. There was no getting little Joe to bed for a time. 'Sissie's come, sissie's come!' he cried, as he danced about the room. How happy I was!

Home again.

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CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning I spent in going all about the dear old house to see that everything was there. Little Joe and Jim were always with me, and I was happy. Mother asked me to sing, and when I had done she called me in to kiss me.

'I am so happy, Minza, and wanted to see my little girl so badly.'

'I'll never go back, mother, never!'

It seems that there had been some fears of her dying a few days before, and they had telegraphed to me; but that morning good, fat old Dr. Waddington came. He gave me a good hug and kiss, and his cheery voice soon assured me that all was well with mother.

'You see, I've brought you another brother, Minza, and he's a singer too.'

The next few days were one flood of happiness. With Angela I visited the dear old limekiln, and there, alone, she tried to tell me in one hour all that had happened in a year. How kind everyone seemed! all glad to see me, so they said. Even Squire Bumps stopped and shook hands with me.

When I returned to the house I found Mr.

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Burroughes. I had quite forgotten him in my happiness at arriving home.

'Now, just a song, Minza. I have been waiting, and must be off by the 7:40 train.'

I sang for him with all my heart. He came up and kissed me; his blue eyes seemed to look deep into my heart. It is not often that a girl of twelve falls in love with a man of twenty-nine. He was my *beau ideal*, and I did not know until years after that it was his money which paid for my first musical instruction in Boston.

It was not long before the old cloud arose again. One thousand dollars in debt! The book and music shop had not been very profitable during our absence. Mother's illness had stopped the revenue from teaching, and yet father was cheerful and sanguine.

'We must be thankful for mother,' he said; and I know he thanked God.

It was the following week that the thunder-clap fell. Father's illness had rather thrown him out of the way of doing business, and to bridge over present and pressing difficulties he had made a loan of three hundred dollars and mortgaged our home, expecting that the sale of our two horses would cover it. But this morning father's uncle, William Gordon (an Englishman), arrived. He was a red-faced man with bonnet-string whiskers. His face and nose were frescoed with that purple tracery which bespeaks a general allowance of good liquor. He had thin lips, and somehow I felt that his visit foreboded no good.

'Yes, I had forgotten that hundred and fifty dollars entirely, Uncle William.'

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'Ah, but Hi 'adn't, me boy. So I came to see about it directly.'

'But I don't know how I can pay it now.'

'Ah! but ye 'avn't tried to pay it, and Hi 'old a mortgage on those horses and must 'ave 'em.'

He was to take old Tom and Fan.

'But uncle, I must pay the mortgage on my house first,' continued father.

'That be blowed! Your botheration poor management will 'ave us hall in the work'ouse. I must 'ave the horses directly. You're goin' to slip 'em from me, but Hi 'old a mortgage.'

This was enough to explain his visit. He wanted his last pound of horse-flesh.

In the morning we saw him take old Tom and Fan out of the barn, and lead them away down the lane. We all cried and hugged the dear old horses, who had been almost a part of the family.

'I'm lost, I'm lost! How can I pay the mortgage now?' moaned father.

'It will come out all right, Robert; don't worry,' said mother, who was sitting up then.

But father had forgotten that the mortgage was so soon due; and that very afternoon papers were served on him, and a notice published in the village newspaper announced that our home was to be sold at a sheriff's sale in seven weeks. Oh, the disgrace of seeing that notice in the paper! Why couldn't it be done privately? Now everyone knew of it.

Instead of mending, matters became worse. Father tried to sell the music business, but there were no buyers; mother offered her piano, but no one had money

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just then; and our home was to be sacrificed under the sheriff's hammer. The sale was to be held on Monday, and on the Sunday I went on my way to church, as the first bell was ringing, with gloomy feelings. Just as I was entering, I met Tim Rathbone. He walked along with me. Tim had no sisters, and he called me his sister.

'You're not stuck-up ef ye *have* been to Boston, are you, Minza?'

'No, Tim,' said I; 'I'm so miserable.'

'What's up?'

'Our home is to be sold to-morrow, and I—don't ——' And I burst out crying.

'Go to the bank and borrow money like my dad,' said Tim defiantly, with his hands in his pockets.

'Yes, but they won't give it to me.'

'I'll go with you,' he asserted.

Tim's words comforted although they did not assure me. The sermon that day was on the text, 'Take no thought for the morrow.' The anthem responded with the words 'Without money—without—without—with—out mon—ey and without—without—price,' rolled over and over on the singers' tongues.

What a mockery! Father was unmanned, mother was still feeble and ill.

The next morning Tim and I stood at the bank door at nine o'clock when it was opened. Mr. Laneson, the cashier, came up just then and asked kindly:

'Well, what's wanted, my little ones?'

'She wants three hundred dollars to pay that mortgedge what's being sold to-day at her house,' spoke up Tim, with a business-like air.

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'What security have you?'

'Myself,' I spoke up. 'Anything—my right arm, my life, anything,' I continued passionately.

'Yes, but that's not collateral and won't pay interest. You do not understand these things, my little girl.'

'But I must have the money, sir! If you want to save life—if you have a soul—I will sell anything—my life—my voice—only——'

'Well now, let's see about this,' said Mr. Laneson, turning to one of the pimply-faced clerks, who had a kind eye, and seemed to know all the circumstances. Mr. Laneson took two bunches of bank-notes from the counter, put a slip on the big hook, and followed me.

The sale was at ten o'clock that morning. The Sheriff was there with a motley crowd of villagers, few of whom were bidders—they came like chronic mourners at a funeral. The Sheriff was about to raise his hammer and begin the sale, when Mr. Laneson whispered in his ear.

The sale stopped. The big, kind-looking Sheriff replied, 'Cut off my fees too. She's a plucky gal, she is.'

The home was saved, but I had sold my voice.

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CHAPTER IX.

THE old home was saved; there is always a critical point in times of misfortune which, if once passed, brings plenty of help.

However, we were still one thousand dollars in debt, and now I had sold my voice for three hundred dollars to the kind-hearted banker.

'This money must be paid back at once to Mr. Laneson,' said mother, caressing the little brother, who was not yet dignified with a name.

'We will sell the business,' said father from the back room, wiping the dishes.

'No, we must not part with some means of income,' replied our little commander, mother. 'Minza, you must give concerts,' she continued quickly.

'How can I, mother?' I asked.

'You must; I will help you. One at La Ford, at Washville, at Smithville, at Brownstown, and other places if necessary.'

In a few days mother began the preparations in earnest. My violin six hours a day; piano two; and voice one. A few days after, dear Fred Burroughes arrived and said that he had secured a holiday vacation to help us.

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'I will be your business manager, Minza.'

And poor Fred was my first manager.

Old Dr. Waddington owned the village paper, and the concert was advertised weeks beforehand in large portentous black letters. The story of saving the home from the Sheriff's sale was judiciously gossiped about, and, although I did not realize what was going on, the concert was looked forward to with uncommon interest. My having been to Boston added an interest to the event in the minds of the country people, but still its success looked dubious. It was found that the Town Hall could not be secured for that evening, and the church trustees, at the request of dear old Rev. Mr. Frazer, decided to allow the use of the church on condition that 'there shall be no loud or sacrilegious applause.'

So my first starring tour began in a church. Is it any wonder that I love its simple faith?

At the last dress rehearsal I was in a fever of excitement. Mother had planned the programme so as to bring all my musical powers into play. The church was lighted for the evening. Angela and the other girls had been busy with the interior decorations all the afternoon. The chandeliers and side lamps were festooned with evergreens as at Christmas time. The people began to come in early. There was the usual flutter among the children in the front seats, trying to catch a glimpse of what was going on behind the curtain.

The first number was 'Pull for the Shore' from Gospel Hymns. I sang the verses and the chorus joined, and when the curtains were pulled aside a real

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boat was wheeled across the stage on bedstead castors, with ropes. This was a modern realism that pleased. It was dramatic and a surprise.

I cannot give the programme completely, but I remember reciting Jean Ingelow's 'Polish Boy' with all the shrieking fervor of the brand-new elocution student. Two operatic numbers from 'Mignon' and 'Maritana' were given on the violin. How dear the old violin seemed as I caressed it! I felt my soul thrill as my fingers touched the strings and wandered through the perilous ascents of the fourth and fifth positions. The cadenza was given pianissimo in almost breathless silence. The harmonics and octave passages and fifth variation seemed so simple that night!

It was encore after encore for every violin selection, in spite of the church trustees' warning. If I remember rightly, my singing was not so well applauded, but the Moon Dance from 'Dinorah' seemed to please. Here were my first trials in make-up and dressing-room drudgery.

We drove about to the succeeding concerts in lumber wagons. Our company, including mothers and aunts who went with us to look after the children, numbered thirty-two. The last concert was given at Mount Orling. Fred told me there were fifty-two of the three hundred dollars yet to raise, and he hoped this last night would do it. Shortly before eight o'clock that evening it began to rain in perfect torrents; the outlook was very blue. There were only sixteen people in the house at the time for beginning the concert.

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'Will you go on with the programme, Mrs. Maxwell?' anxiously whispered Fred.

'Certainly,' she replied.

Of course the singers were careless, and many mistakes occurred. It nearly unnerved mother; it seemed such an inglorious end for so auspicious a beginning. For the last number I sang a solo and the chorus joined. Some of the singers forgot the retard, and the piece ended pell-mell—a breakdown! The girls and boys in the chorus sniggered, the solitary sixteen in the great room of empty chairs tittered. Quick as a flash mother struck the chords for 'Home, Sweet Home,' and nodded to me. Visions of the Sheriff's sale came before me, and I sang. Tears were in my eyes—mother's were moist.

'Home, home, sweet, sweet home!'

is the passage of the song that thrills.

The curtain was drawn.

Just then Fred came forward rather dejectedly. Old Farmer Goulden, who owned a large number of farms in the neighborhood, followed him.

'That gal ought to be a big singer, mum,' he said to mother.

'Yes, sir,' she replied softly.

'Durn' poor house to-night. Say, little un, sing that air song ag'in.'

It was sung to please him. Tears stood in his eyes.

'May I kiss the gal, mum? I just lost my little gal Aggie—she sleeps in the cimetary out there, mum—she's in that home over there, the Lord be praised, mum. Say, that little gal can sing; and that's the song my

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Aggie used to sing. Say, mum, that was worth fifty dollars to me, by gosh it was, and ye've had tuff luck to-night. Buy that gal suthin' with this. Good even'.'

He was gone, and had left a crisp bank-note in mother's hands.

There was a consultation as to whether it should be kept. I said 'yes' and Fred obeyed me, although mother protested.

It was a dreary ride home, six miles through muddy roads after the rain; but the battle was won, and to-morrow the debt to Mr. Laneson should be nearly all paid from the concert funds, and my voice was my own again.

This was my first concert tour. Time always softens the rough edges of hard experiences, and now I look back on those days as among the happiest of my life—I had detected no minor chord in them.

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CHAPTER X

AFTER the concert experience, father surprised us by solemnly announcing that he was going into politics.

'Mother, they want me to run for town recorder. All the business men and leading ratepayers of the village have promised to support me, and——

'Robert, you know I hate politics, and I am afraid that you're too trusting.'

'Oh, no, Helen; they would not be so anxious if that were true, and, besides, the salary is two hundred dollars a year, and that would help feed these little mouths.'

'Well, I don't think much of it; they're a deceiving lot—these politicians.'

'Well, nothing risk, nothing gain, mother. Faint heart ne'er won fair lady.'

Father had a few standard quotations that he could always offer on any occasion.

Never can I forget that election day a week later. The young rowdies of the town were led by a young attorney who had just returned from college. He was father's opponent, and was one who had induced father to become a candidate; but everything is fair in politics. There was not much of a contest on the

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balance of father's ticket, which was printed as follows —I still have it.

FOR MAYOR
WILLIAM BOWDISH

FOR ASSESSOR
JAMES GALLAXY

FOR TRUSTEE
WILLIAM HOOKING

FOR RECORDER
ROBERT MAXWELL

Father was on the popular and winning ticket. I went with him to the election quarters in the afternoon. The room was blue with smoke from the town idlers. The ballot box was presided over by two old citizens, and clerks wrote down the names as the tickets were folded and handed to the inspectors and put through the small hole in the ballot-box with solemn ceremony.

'Well, Robert, you'll have a walk-away,' joked old Squire Bumps. Something told me that he was lying; but father, trusting father, though it was so.

A moment later father's opponent, the young attorney, Cicero Corbutt, entered the room with a large crowd of half-drunken rowdies. On their coat lapels they wore printed labels, 'Sooner men.'

'Rah for Cicero! We're "Sooner," we are, and we'll knock out the durned ole mossbacks.'

They filed in and voted. Many of them were men

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temporarily employed in building a railroad some distance from the village. Cicero glared at us through his spectacles as if to say, 'I am a politician.'

'We'll fix 'em, boys—we must hustle some more votes,' he cried.

'Rah for the "Sooners!"' was the echoing response.

'Come an' have something, boys,' declaimed the oratorical Cicero, and he led his Coxey army out of the door.

How breathlessly we waited the result of the count that night! I had my fears, but hoped and hoped somehow that father had a majority of the votes. He laughed at my fears.

'Why, do you suppose that Smithville, the respectable ratepayers of Smithville, will allow those rowdies to rule us? I must go down and be ready for congratulations.'

Not long after he had gone we heard the wild yells from the Town Hall, 'Rah for Sooners—Sooners gits there—whoop-la-tiger-ree!'

Father's ticket had won the day, but Cicero had had split tickets printed with all the names of the opposition ticket on them except father's, and his own name inserted instead. Many of the tickets had undoubtedly been put in by voters under the impression that they were voting the straight ticket with father's name upon it, but they had voted the fatal 'split.' But this was American politics; it was called shrewd and sharp tactics.

'Three cheers for Cicero!' rang out on the night air.

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The day was lost—poor father! He soon came back: his face told us the result. 'Beaten by two votes,' was all he said.

'Enough of politics, Robert!' said mother softly.

I felt very bitter towards Cicero Corbutt, but our ways soon drifted apart, and I never had an opportunity for my well-planned revenge. Every politician has his day, and the leader of the 'Sooners' was shelved, like a falling meteor, in the prime of life; they say he is now a Populist, struggling to rise again.

Poor father! He retired from the dazzling arena of American politics, and never forgot the lesson.

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CHAPTER XI.

In spite of the political defeat, we managed to live. We can always bear reversals better when realized than when anticipated. I continued going to school and assisting father at the music store, and mother was able to resume her teaching.

The last days at the old brick school-house, with its cracked bell, were, I think, the happiest of my life. I had then my first real boy lover.

Our teacher was Ellen Riser, one full of inspiration; she was a typical strong-minded, self-reliant American woman. What a strife there was among the girls to stay with her at night! She never seemed above us, out of our reach, but always one of us. Her methods of teaching were rather unconventional. We were taught to probe for reason and logic rather than memorize rules. Her master mind seemed to bring all the complex curriculum of reasoning within our childish comprehension. She interested us, she inspired us. There was always a rivalry that stimulated effort and ambition for the future.

We boys and girls would all talk together during recess and after school. The boys would manage to sit beside us at classes, and an occasional sly note

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during school hours would arrange, 'company home' after the Lyceum, which was a literary and musical programme given every Friday night in the High School room. Miss Riser acted as judge in the debates. At these entertainments the boys were allowed to see the girls home. Never can I forget the time when I received my first note, which read: 'May I see you safely home from Lyceum Friday night?—TIMOTHY RATHBONE.'

As I was red-headed, and not particularly pretty, this was thrilling. I had always been a sister to the boys before, helping on the other couples; but now I had a lover of my own. I replied, in a crude, scrawling hand: 'Your company is accepted.—MINZA.'

Next morning, as was customary when a boy and girl began to talk interestingly alone together, there appeared on the blackboard, in great flaming letters, these words:—

$$\left\{ \begin{matrix} & \text{TIM} \\ \text{and} & \\ & \text{MINZA} \end{matrix} \right\}$$

We were linked, and discussed matrimony freely.

We are all perhaps silly, as boys and girls; but that is the time when we have the purest affection.

It was quite the rage to give surprise parties, when we would gather at a friend's house, taking along refreshments, and surprise someone. The games were not precisely intellectual; they included 'post office,' 'spat 'em out,' 'hissing and clapping,' with forfeits and fines, and the merriment in paying the penalty.

The first night Tim took me home he barely touched my arm, and we fairly ran, we were so excited.

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But we got over that.

Tim was a good boy. They called him 'Wildy,' an abbreviation for Wild Irishman; but his heart was good; he loved his mother, and that won me.

One night we passed the old limekiln, on our way home from the Lyceum. It was a gentle night in June. There was the soft, scented odor of new-turned ground, and the smoldering of burning rubbish in the gardens. The summer stars made it seem so happy. We had not spoken.

'Minza, we graduate in June, and I'm goin' away.'

'Is that so?' said I innocently, although I knew it well.

'Yes, and we're goin' to part, and I——'

'Oh, isn't that a pretty star, Tim?'

'Now, Minza, don't be foolish; we're going to be married some day.'

'Is that so?'

'Yes, and you know it; and I'm going to be a lawyer, and I want you to——'

'Look out for that cow, Tim!'

'Now, Minza, you must not flirt and go with the other fellows when I am gone, will you?'

'Why, Tim, we can't be married right away, and——'

'Minza, you're the best girl on earth, next to mother!'

How I loved him for that!

'I am going to kiss you.'

And he did.

'When I'm a lawyer, we will travel over Europe, like Mrs. Buggins.'

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'Don't you think these are the same stars that are over in Europe now?'

'Minza's my star always,' he said, as passionately as a boy can.

And he kissed me again and held me in his arms, just like stage people. We were betrothed.

I think pictures and stage scenes educate young lovers. Tim's dark earnest eyes were very sincere, and his curly hair just outside his little cap made him look quite poetical.

Graduation Day arrived. Tim was making his last speech, and his voice, just changing, gave a variation from squeaking falsetto to heavy bass; but he was so earnest! The exercises were held in the Town Hall, which was decorated with the roses and flowers of June.

Over the stage was a motto worked in evergreens:

'No Steps Backward.'

It had no reference to the back steps.

All was excitement over our dresses. Here was where my first wrestle with stage dresses began. There were sixteen in the class. We had our pictures taken the afternoon before Graduation Day, and what a flood of recollections it brings back!

Where are those sixteen now? Some up, some down, as the world goes; some dead. But what ambitious hopes throbbed that night! We felt as if we were quite ready for real life. Miss Riser rehearsed us in our essays and orations. My theme was 'The Tale of an Old Shoe;' the others fluently discussed

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'Success,' 'Happiness,' 'Wisdom,' and other great problems.

The evening arrived. Mother was there to look after the music, and even little Joe and the babies were brought to see 'Sissy graduate.' All the parents beamed upon the graduates fondly. Old Beemer, the deaf blacksmith, was in the front seat; and his eyes never left sweet, blushing little Dora, his only daughter. We sat in a semicircle; all the girls were clad in white and wore white slippers. Tim looked very important in his first white vest. Miss Riser sat at one side, attired in neat black with white ruching and lace about her neck.

Some of the boys forgot their orations, and the same breathless thrill held me until I had read my essay that I still feel just before appearing on the stage. The smaller girls brought the floral trophies and laid them at our feet. Sitting there in the cool glare of the audience, I caught a glimpse of father and the babies.

'"Tale of an Old Shoe." Miss Maxwell!' I arose and bowed to Miss Riser.

'Dat's my sissy! dat's my sissy!' broke out little Jimmy.

The audience tittered. Father and mother were crestfallen. I started to read. The first pages were missing! I looked and felt blank. Miss Riser glanced over and blushed. An awkward pause. I looked straight ahead despairingly, and from memory repeated, as best I could, the missing pages. As soon as I could depend upon my manuscript again the terrible lump in my throat left me, but it did not save

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the family another disgraceful blunder. After the applause a little voice again piped out—

'Dat's my sissy ! dat's my sissy !' and father had to walk out with the babies in the ripple of laughter that followed.

After the exercises the audience surged forward to congratulate the young intellectual gladiators. I felt the sting of disgrace until Miss Riser, who had parted with the others, took me aside and gave me a warm kiss.

'Dear Minza, you are going to be famous some day. I am proud of you. In the years to come, do not forget how your homely school teacher loved you.'

We had a quiet cry together. That is the way a woman can best ease her mind.

During August, father sold the music and book business. The money was to be used to send me to college.

Tim had gone away soon after graduation, and I received my first love letters from him—not entirely eloquent and poetical, but treasured for the happy memories they bring back.

Off to college ! What girl does not remember that epoch of her life? As the train whizzed away, my mind wandered back to those sleeping baby faces, and mother holding the lamp and shading her eyes for a last look at me through the darkness.

Well, life is made up of partings and greetings.

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CHAPTER XII.

IOWA has many good colleges, but of course I think old Cornwell is the best of all, in spite of the sad memories connected with my own brief collegiate career. How lonesome and strange it seemed on my first arrival! I recognized the buildings on the hills from the pictures I had seen. The landscape was festooned with handsome autumn foliage. The old chapel tower and the chimes of the clock were incidents mingled with my first recollections.

We drove along the shaded road up the long hill to the 'Sem.' or Nunnery,' as it was called, where the girls boarded. I did not know a single person in the village; and there is always a first shrinking from strangers, even on a tram or in railway cars, that is decidedly uncomfortable to the strangers.

As we passed by the long row of pleasant cottages I fancied each occupant of the village was necessarily a student with scarcely a thought of worldly things.

Who knew but in one of these homes there dwelt the typical young student with a long moustache that had taken up my youthful fancies?—and then I thought of Tim! Here, I thought, a professor must dwell, for there was a hammock in the porch, and no student would have time to swing in a hammock.

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I found out my mistake afterwards.

Miss Cooker, the preceptress, met me on the broad steps that led up to the study rooms over the dining-room below. The girls peeped from behind the doors of the rooms, giving shy glances at me as I passed through the hall with my homely green bag. How I longed for Angela or someone that I knew!

Miss Cooker was a severely intellectual woman, whose heart seemed withered. Her face was wrinkled with study, and her false teeth made her mouth look full, firm, and decided; but she was a woman of high ideals, and tried to be kind.

After Professor Garlem, the president, had classified me on my examination marks from the High School, I began to feel more at home. As I was the last pupil to arrive, I was given a little room on the third floor by myself. The furniture was simple—a study table, washstand, small mirror, a little iron bedstead and rug. Yet it was seclusion—a retreat, and I soon learned to love it as home. At seven o'clock in the morning we were to be ready for breakfast in the basement. Our oatmeal was always steaming hot. At 7:45 came our horrid Latin Lesson—'Amo, amas, amat.' The conjunctions were a nightmare. At 8:30 the dear old chapel bell rang out like a break in the day. We each had our particular seat at the tables as in the chapel.

The devotional exercises were conducted in turn by different members of the faculty. Professor Boysen's long prayers were supposed to match his long patriarchal whiskers. He reminded me of pictures of Moses. Little Professor Goblin's study of Greek

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gave him choice language, but his Boston pronunciation made it just as difficult to understand as the Greek itself. Miss Cooker's appeals were cold and classic, like her teeth. Professor Collinsgate's prayer was a meek and timid supplication from a meek and timid little man. Professor Brighton was always short, sharp, and crusty, and his low shoes often revealed different colored hosiery. Professor Wilhelm gave his prayers a tinge of the civil-engineering squint through a theodolite as he turned his eyes to the ceiling.

These impromptu prayers were so often repeated that each one seemed to have committed his pet phrases to memory, and the same words rolled out time after time. Lieutenant Jenkins from West Point, who had charge of the college battalions, did not lead in religious services. He simply bowed his bald head very reverently, and looked good. Miss Bernard, one of the teachers in the Musical Conservatory, presided at the grand piano, and gave her pretty head a nod to begin the singing. Those songs were the inspiring portion of the service. How those five hundred voices used to ring out the old 'Portuguese Hymn:'

'How firm a foundation,
Ye saints of the Lord!'

Strangers, to Alma Mater and distinguished visitors were allowed a few minutes to talk after prayers, and how wickedly we used to pray that they would break into the next class hour, which was usually a course of mathematics.

Under Miss Bernard I continued my vocal studies

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and gradually became acquainted with the other students. I thought it a crowning honor when the Philomathean Society invited me to join their circle. A few days later the Galateans, the rival society, also invited me; but I chose the first. Programmes of a literary and musical character were given every Friday evening. I was often asked to give vocal selections. After the exercises a social session was held, and 'Rule No 12' was suspended for the occasion, and the boys allowed to see the girls home. The first few times I walked across the campus alone to the 'Sem.,' with the other homely girls. But all homely girls have some feature which attracts admiration more than mere beauty itself. A well-formed and delicate hand, a dimple well displayed, shining teeth, pretty hair, or a bright twinkle to the eye, or a clever tongue —every girl is blessed with some attraction, and womankind spends a large fraction of her waking hours in appearing beautiful. Is it appreciated? I envied the girls with lovers, and one night Bob Burnette, the janitor of the 'Sem.,' asked to 'see me home.' He was a bright fellow, and always left me a generous amount of wood, with which to build my fires. He had worn his coat through by carrying the firewood on his shoulders, and I mended it for him. We became good friends, and he called me his sister.

'Yes, surely Tim will not care,' thought I, as I looked into the boyish face of the photograph on my table.

Robert was my father's name, and I was rather pleased to have his namesake's company. He squeezed my arm tight as we walked down the shaded lane with

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trees on either side, and the moonbeams shining through the lattice-work of branches. There is always love breathed in such an atmosphere. A glance into each other's eyes, with the moon just right, and soft silent shadows, has often sealed love's message.

Robert was a self-reliant fellow, making his way through college and studying for the ministry. While he was not exactly ostracized by the 'Sem.' girls, they seemed to think very little of going with 'our janitor.' The rich men's sons were in better demand.

Now, I had no idea of falling in love with Bob. In fact, I don't think I knew what love was; but I must confess I liked him, and he was my 'solid fellow.'

One Saturday, after a lonely walk, I found a note under my door, with a liberal allowance of firewood outside:

'Minza, I must see you to-night—Bob.'

I could not imagine what it meant, as we always met each other several times a day.

It had been raining, and was a cold, damp night. I wanted to post a letter home. Bob was passing with an umbrella.

'Bob, may I borrow your umbrella?'

'You may, if you borrow me.'

'All right,' I said, and off we went in the rain. The umbrella was small, and we were rather close together. Bob was evidently nervous about something, and talked but little. Just as we were about to turn into the campus, under the light of a street lamp, Bob turned to me and said:

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'Minza, I love you, and——' That was as far as he got. I did not expect it, and turned pale.

'Minza, will you love me?' he continued, slipping his arm about my waist.

I pushed it away, and turned paler. Had I been a flirt? Poor Tim's face was before me as Duty. Bob's dark eyes flashed Love. I gave no answer. He pressed my hand.

'My life is yours, Minza.'

We went to the society rooms, where I was to sing. It was not a love song, or one fitted to express sentiment, but Bob followed me closely with his eyes, and my voice quivered.

'She must be ill to-night,' I heard them say, as I passed out.

'Take me home, Bob,' I pleaded. His eyes seemed to pierce me deeper than ever. I gave him no answer, but he kissed me.

Was I a coquette?

'Minza, don't trifle. Marry for love—don't flirt—and remember how Bob loves you;' and he gave me that self-reliant and defiant look which I so much admired. School girls sometimes take these matters very seriously. Here was I with two lovers, and not yet sixteen!

On the college bulletin boards in a glass case, near the main entrance, was the programme of the 'Joint Public' to be given by the Philomathean and Delphi Societies. My name was there; I liked to see it there. These Publics are the great events of the term.

A religious revival was in progress, where many students were 'converted' or born again. The singing

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is always very effective, and the influence of the young ladies undoubtedly causes many of the young men to 'take a stand.' It is a noble and earnest revival of religious feeling.

I did not believe in a public profession of faith, and was looked upon as a very wicked girl. Bob was a leader at prayer-meetings, and his voice was so eloquent in his pleadings and exhortations! I did my praying in such meetings alone with my God, and when those were asked to stand who 'felt a new and sanctified heart' I sat still. They prayed for me as a sinner.

This worried Bob, and he asked me for an explanation. I gave him my religious views in detail.

At the coming Public I was to sing, and Bob was to deliver an oration as the representative of the Delphi Society. The large auditorium was thronged. My song was a beautiful piece of plaintive music filled with minor chords.—'There is no hope beyond.' I did not think especially of the sentiment conveyed by the words, as the music itself was really beautiful. My solo preceded Bob's oration. When I had finished I saw that it had brought a frown to the faces of the professors in the front seats; 'but Bob's pure high-minded religious ideas will please them,' thought I. His clear voice rang out:—

'I am not a believer in lip-service religion and in emotional revivals, and will not serve as a minister to God, because I have not felt a call from on high. I believe in my God and Savior, but a too common profession of religion—hacking it about and putting it on and off like a cloak—destroys its sacredness.'

Horrors! His words fell like a bombshell. They

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were my sentiments expressed, and how I wished I had never uttered them to Bob!

He defiantly threw his fists at the faculty and poured forth his new convictions.

The cloud darkened, for his oration, with its innocent title, 'Hell and Hypocrisy,' which was supposed to be a learned theological argument, had passed through the professors' hands without reading. He was just at that age when a college student will approach any subject for his oration and swing the world about his head.

His oration and my song were the talk and scandal of the week. We expected to be tried and convicted by the faculty and reprimanded in chapel. Linked together in the disgrace, we naturally drifted together in sympathy with each other.

The next week Professor Garlem called us into his room, No. 14.

'Miss Maxwell, for the safety of the young minds in our care, and the religious institutions this college represents, it has been decided that you and Mr. Burnette are to retire for one term at least. There are only two weeks more of the present term, and it need not be known——'

'It will be known!' flashed out Bob. 'Your bigotry in trying to contract and narrow our minds to a single religious belief is a disgrace. Freedom of thought——'

'Never mind, now this has been decided upon,' said Professor Garlem firmly.

'Thank you, sir,' I responded sarcastically.

'This girl is innocent, sir; I am the culprit, and

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you are cowards to visit upon her my disgrace,' said Bob warmly.

'Be cool, Mr. Burnette,' replied the Professor; 'it's all for the best. We bear no malice.'

'No, nor love of the human heart either,' retorted Bob.

Well, of course I cried that night. Bob tried to comfort me as he carried up his wood, and I stood on the stairs talking to him until Miss Cooker ordered me to my room.

One term at college, and expelled! It stung my pride! How could I tell my mother? Bob now seemed to have claims on me, and I could not help admiring his pluck.

'Minza, I am going to be a newspaper man—going to Dakota—it's booming; when I am settled we'll be married.'

'I am only sixteen; besides, my mother——'

'Well, we'll see,' he replied confidently.

An effort was made to keep the expulsion quiet, but, like all State secrets, it oozed through the key-holes or somewhere, and all the students knew of it.

As Bob and I stood on the rear platform of the train when we left Cornwell and watched the old chapel, the 'Sem.,' and Nunnery fade from view, we were sad; for, although we felt glad to leave in one way, there was a feeling of banishment about it.

I never returned to college. Expelled! How the word made me shudder! I felt like a convict.

I reached home with a heavy heart, and told mother everything. She, of course, called them 'stupids,' and said I was right; but she did not like

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the idea of this Bob being mixed up with the matter.

'Where does he live?' asked mother.

'At Shelbyville,' I replied absently.

'That is where Tim has gone,' continued mother.

Here my love troubles began in earnest.

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CHAPTER XIII

NATURALLY there was a good deal of gossip current at Smithville concerning my return from college, but it proved fortunate in several ways. Father continued in poor health, and mother, with her teaching and three babies, left me quite enough to do.

It was in mid-winter that baby Tod was taken ill with inflammation of the lungs. I was his nurse, and either mother or I was always at his bedside. With a suffering babe, you cannot locate the ailment or know always what to do. It is a pitiable sight to see a mother pouring out her heart and unable to help her suffering child.

How well I remember that illness! When I made holes through the frost on the window pane, and watched for the doctor through the long dismal afternoon, what a comfort it was to see his portly form coming round the corner! The crisis was not passed with Tod when Joe began to complain. His illness did not seem to be serious, and father tucked him in bed with the joking remark, 'We shall have quite a hospital, after all.' Suddenly I noticed Joe coughing severely, and he seemed to wilt away gradually like a rose without water in a hot room.

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'Send for the doctor, quick!' I cried to father.

Mother was soon there; the little heart was just beating. 'He's in a fit,' she cried.

The doctor arrived. 'Oh, he will pull through all right,' he said, as he measured out some powders in a paper and labelled them: 'One every hour.'

How long that night seemed as mother and I watched over two baby cots! Little Joe was now the anxiety. At midnight the small form writhed in another convulsion. 'Go, Minza, and sing grandma's favorite hymn. It may quiet him,' mother said.

I sang old 'Nettleton:'

> 'Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
> Tune my heart to sing Thy praise.'

The singing awoke father and seemed to soothe the little sufferer. He panted in quick, short breaths, but his face suddenly became livid.

'My God! my God! his feet are cold. Quick, quick, the irons!' cried father.

'Robert, Robert, he's dying—dying!' moaned mother across the cot.

Just then the little eyes began to roll.

'Run, Minza, and bring Mrs. Gooding,' said mother.

The alarm was given, and the kind neighbors were soon there.

Oh, that first death scene! Father was kneeling at the bedside, still chafing the little one's feet; mother felt his pulse, but his eyes were already glassy.

Little Joe was dead.

Have you ever felt that stifling first flow of grief?

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I thought God was cruel, and had punished me for my wickedness at Cornwell.

Towards morning, worn out, I threw myself on my bed and cried out: 'Shall I never see little Joe any more? Is he dead? No, it can not be.'

In a restless sleep, I dreamed we were playing together at the old limekiln, with the waves washing upon the white stones, little Joe and I. Christ appeared in long white raiment and took us both to heaven.

When I awoke—how cruel it seemed!—I could not realize the truth.

'Joe, little Joe!' I cried out wildly in my grief.

From Heaven I seemed to hear the only answer—

'My sissy's tummin' too.'

One never likes to acknowledge family perferences, but little Joe was my favorite. Oh, I loved him so, and now he was taken! I tried to comfort mother, but her grief was too deep to reach with words. I shivered when they brought that little white coffin and placed it on two chairs in the parlor.

The fumes of saltpetre filled the room, and brought back that death scene for months after.

The funeral was held at the house. Dear old Mr. Frazer's voice was so comforting! His words soothed; there seemed to be a hope beyond—that little Joe had merely gone out to play, and would soon return.

The day of the funeral was dark and dismal; it had been raining very hard, and made the pure white snow a slimy yellow slush. The little coffin was draped with evergreen boughs from the trees in the front garden, under which little Joe used to play.

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Mother and I, hidden behind heavy crape veils, sat near it. The littte face was just visible, and seemed wrapped in peaceful slumber.

> 'There beamed a smile,
> So fixed, so holy, from that cherub brow,
> Death gazed, and left it there. He dared not steal
> The signet-ring of heaven.'

The house was thronged with friends and neighbors, and scores stood outside in the drizzling rain. What a breathless silence before the service, alone with the dead!

They sang little Joe's favorite song, 'Shall We Gather at the River?' slowly, softly, sweetly, and the only accompaniment was the patter of the rain on the roof, like a fugue of falling tears. A short prayer, a Scripture lesson, and a few words spoken direct to our hearts of the hope of again meeting little Joe, made up the simple service.

Oh, that last kiss of our dead! What household has not suffered it? It is this moment that breaks the mother's heart, when she thinks of her child in the cold and lonely grave. As long as the corpse is in the house she is not so heart-broken, but it is when the lid is last sealed that the mother's heart-fountains burst forth.

Standing about the little grave, we heard the clods of earth fall upon the coffin. Would it awaken little Joe? How I wanted to stop the old sexton!

'Oh, I can never leave him here!' I cried, and burst from the carriage, as we were turning away.

'Come, Minza, be calm,' said father. 'Mother needs your comfort. Remember others, Minza,' and

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he carried me back to the closed carriage. 'Well, Robert, we have her left,' said mother, pressing me tight.

For years after I could not visit little Joe's grave. Mother and father used to go every Sunday with flowers, but I never could endure to bring back the memories of that death-scene. I could gaze on the enlarged picture in the parlor, and the sweet baby eyes that looked down upon me—mother's own eyes —but I always thought of that midnight when I could almost see his little soul floating away to heaven and joining the angel choirs.

Time may wear away the pangs, the paroxysms of grief, but to-day my heart is touched and purified by the tender memories of little Joe.

In later years I was able to bring myself to see that little grave, for when I die I want to lie beside the little form I loved so well.

Life's first real grief!—the Minor Chord was struck!

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CHAPTER XIV

THAT spring the music-shop was sold, and the money from mother's music lessons was our entire income. Father remained poorly, and now grief and worry began to undermine mother's health. One day Dr. Waddington called and looked over his spectacles, inquiring of father:—

'Robert, were you in the Army?'

'Yes, 42nd Volunteers.'

'Were you ever wounded?'

'Yes, several times—at Vicksburg and Shiloh.'

'I thought so. Do you know, I think you are suffering from those wounds to-day?'

'Tut, tut, man, I got over it, and am as well and strong as ever.'

'Yes, you are,' said the Doctor sarcastically. 'But you come down to the office, and let me make an examination.'

That afternoon father went down, and the doctor evidently found traces of a rebel bullet.

Dr. Waddington waddled down to our house late in the evening, very much excited. He took off his worn silk hat, and wiped his bald head reflectively.

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'Mrs. Maxwell, can you put some sense into that man's head?'

'How's that, Doctor?'

'Robert deserves a pension for his army service, and not only that, but back pay as well.'

'Yes; but, Doctor, you cannot get a pension without political influence, and you know Robert is not much of a politician,' she replied quizzically.

'Well, that may be,' continued the Doctor; 'but it's worth trying for.'

'All right, he'll do it.' When mother said so, that settled it.

The application was made.

The formal papers were sent to the young Congressman representing our district. He replied promptly, stating that he remembered meeting father, and should 'give the matter immediate and personal attention.'

'That's the way he writes to all of them,' said mother ironically.

We thought nothing more about it, and had little hope; but one morning, when I was helping father with the housework, and mother was busy giving a lesson, a telegram was handed me.

'This must be a mistake, I don't receive telegrams,' I said to the boy.

'No, it isn't; I knows my business,' he answered saucily.

There it was, addressed: 'MINZA MAXWELL.'

I tore it open hastily. It was dated 'Washington, D. C.,' and marked D. H., meaning 'Dead Head:'—

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'Your father's pension and back pay granted. Letter follows. Congratulations.

'THOMAS BAYLING, M. C.,
'Per TIM, Secy.'

'Tim! Could it be Tim Rathbone?' I said excitedly.

'We have a friend at court,' said mother smilingly.

We could hardly wait for that letter. Father insisted that there must be an error somewhere, and even mother did not seem to have much confidence in the news.

During the week a large fat envelope came without any stamps on. Inside were numerous blank forms to fill, and the information stated: 'Robert Maxwell, Co. M., 42nd Iowa Volunteers, granted a pension of six dollars per month and back pay amounting to $1,276.60.'

I screamed with joy. We were no longer one thousand dollars in debt! That evening we were busy planning what to do with the money.

'It seems so heavenly,' I cried, and went to the piano and played the gayest waltz I knew. Then I hugged my violin and galloped off a mazurka. As the revelry of music increased, my eyes suddenly fell on that little baby face looking down from the corner.

'O little Joe! what is all this to us now that we have lost you!'

The family council lasted long into the night. Mother wanted to use the money to complete my musical studies, and father agreed. At first I wanted to re-invest it in a business, but when I caught mother's poor wan face a suggestion occurred to me.

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'Mother, you and father must start next week for England—visit dear old grandpa. It will do you good, and break——'

'No, no, dear, we cannot think of it. You must complete your studies,' insisted mother.

'Then, Maggie, we must pay our debts—one thousand dollars,' interposed father.

'Now, Robert, you must keep still. This money shall not pay a penny of it,' said mother firmly.

'But is it honest?—what will people say?' protested father.

'Never mind, let me manage that;' and mother managed it.

It was finally settled that mother was to take little Tod with her, and Jimmy was to remain with me, and they were to start the following week to visit the scenes of father's childhood in dear old England.

Of course the village of Smithville talked and gossiped—'Maxwell ought to pay his debts.'

We had become nerved to facing contrary winds of public opinion.

Here again was the breaking of home ties, and, although I was enthusiastic about their going, it was a hard struggle.

The same old midnight train was to take them away. We tried to be cheerful that evening, but our faces reflected serious forebodings. At the last all was bustle and hurry. Again came the parting kiss. Little Tod chattered with delight and was for ever in the way, and Jimmy cried, but the 'bus was waiting.

It was May, and the lilacs and snowballs were in bloom, their fragrance filling the air.

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The next day the old home seemed desolate. Jimmy kept me busy, and was soon off to school. It is always those left at home who most keenly feel the pangs of parting.

How anxiously I watched the newspapers for the arrival of the steamer! It was overdue, and I pictured a shipwreck in mid-ocean. Angela was staying with me, and two merry little housemaids were we until the thought of the steamer being overdue sobered us.

One day Angela came running from the village postoffice. 'It's there, it's there!' she cried far down the street, and a heavy load was lifted from our hearts. I kissed Jim's jam-covered face over and over again. The steamer had reached Southampton.

They were to be gone three months, and it seemed like an age. In the meantime, Bob's letters arrived frequently. He was a hard-headed, practical, business-like fellow, and always wrote sensibly. A few weeks later, a short note from Tim announced that he would call the following week.

Here was a dilemma!

I told Angela all about it, and insisted that she must take one of my lovers off my hands.

'Which one?' she asked.

'It doesn't matter,' I replied desperately. Tim had fresh claims on me now, if we *did* quarrel in our letters, and had, indeed, ceased correspondence until the pension telegram was received.

Then, too, Tim was my first sweetheart, although Robert seemed to be taking matters for granted.

The next week I was reading one of Bob's long

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letters when there was a knock at the door.

It was Tim.

I felt fluttered for a moment, and before I could answer he kissed me. When I found my tongue, I tried to thank him for his kindly interest on behalf of father's pension.

'Don't mention it, Meg ; let's take a walk down to the old limekiln. Yes, bring Jimmy along, if——'

Every spot about the old limekiln seemed to retain its happy memories.

'Minza, you are growing beautiful. Do you still sing?' said Tim, when Jimmy was at a safe distance.

'A little. To put the babies to sleep. Don't I, Jimkins?' I said, appealing to the young rascal; but he was out of hearing.

'I'll be Jimmy, Meg—please !'

'Oh, you're too big now. Besides, Tim, you've—you've got a moustache.'

'Yes, you remember, Meg, that was my greatest ambition as a boy. When I had a moustache like Judge Buggins, then—hullo—who's coming?'

Down the path from the house came Fred Burroughes.

'That's Mr. Burroughes, my friend.'

'Ah, it's Mr. Burroughes, your *friend*, is it ?' said Tim sourly.

I advanced to meet Fred, and when he bent to kiss me I shrank back and looked at Tim.

'Why, Minza, what's the matter, little one?' said Fred.

I could not answer. Those deep blue eyes seemed to express his pain and read my thoughts.

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'Well, I'll not bother,' said Fred, as he started to go.

'Tim, this is Mr. Burroughes—Mr. Burroughes, Mr. Rathbone,' said I, introducing them.

They bowed stiffly, and if I had not been so sorry for Fred, I should have burst out laughing at their awkwardness.

Fred left us. I called after him, but he was out of hearing.

Tim and I were children again.

Fred came to the house later, and with the help of Angela we spent a pleasant afternoon with our music.

Like all young lovers, Tim and I indulged in an occasional quarrel. All persons do who are constantly together. It is human to wear off the rough edges of temper on one another now and then. As my housework took a great deal of my time, Angela and Tim were thrown together more than I really liked, although I had asked her, as my younger sister, to entertain him.

A few weeks more, and father and mother and little Tod would return.

The day before July 4, when the village was preparing for one of the real old-fashioned celebrations of our national birthday, I wandered with Jimmy through the grove to the limekiln. During the afternoon the authorities had arranged temporary seats in the grove for the exercises on the morrow, and built a portentous-looking platform for the speakers.

The lemonade booths covered with boughs and the different amusement arena and shooting galleries were striking camp. The speakers' platform looked very

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imposing. Tim was to read the Declaration of Independence and I was to sing 'Hail Columbia!' I thought how handsome Tim with his curly hair would look, and I pictured him in the future as a great statesman. The village brass band were holding their last rehearsal in the Town Hall, and the bass solo and 'afterparts' were nearly raising the roof. The sky was clear, and the setting sun behind the purple grove was sending up spears of sunshine from the foliage that lined the horizon. It was to be a typical Spread-eagle American 4th of July and the British lion's tail was to be properly twisted.

I was happy just then, and expected Tim shortly. He came, and somehow I felt like teasing—and I teased him all the evening. He tried to be serious and see me alone. I showed him Bob's photograph and talked of how good Mr. Burroughes had been. He took Angela home and left me in a very bad humor.

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CHAPTER XV

THE festivities of the following day began with the booming of cannon and the snapping of fire crackers. The parade was imposing, and Angela really looked beautiful as 'Columbia' in the float with forty-six little girls about her representing each of the States. The exercises passed off smoothly. Tim read splendidly and was applauded to the echo, but we had scarcely spoken to each other all day.

That evening a company of young friends sat with me on the veranda watching the fireworks; I wondered why Tim did not come. At last the finishing 'good-night' was fired. Two figures came down the path—Angela and Tim.

'Where have you naughty folk been?' I asked jokingly.

'We've been married,' spoke up Tim defiantly.

It was a blow which staggered me. I thought they were joking, and kissed Angela; but another glance at Tim's face told me it was true.

The last dying embers of the fireworks said 'good-night.'

I turned to go into the house. It was a 'good-night' to youth's young love dream.

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'Good-night,' I gasped.

'Why, Meg, won't you congratulate me?' pleaded Angela innocently. She had taken my lover.

Tim still looked defiant as they left in the darkness.

My heart was broken. 'Alone, alone,' seemed the solemn minor echo of the night breezes, as I entered the silent darkness of the home.

'Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine?
Naught see I fixed or sure in thee!
I do not know thee—nor what deeds are thine:
Love, love, what wilt thou with this heart of mine?
Naught see I permanent or sure in thee!'

When I awoke the next morning I again thought it surely must be a joke that they had played upon me, but it proved to be a reality.

A large number of American marriages originate from motives of spite or lonesomeness rather than from love. We seldom marry our real sweethearts. Love! What is love? Certainly, it has never yet been analyzed in words. But when Tim was beyond my reach I thought I loved him, and especially when I fancied he had married Angela out of pique.

That night I was ready to offer myself as a foreign missionary to go among the heathen, or to join the Salvation Army.

A day or so before I expected father and mother to return, Bob arrived.

The same old, reliant, conceited and energetic Bob.

He kissed me, and said coolly that he had been arranging to start a newspaper in Dakota.

'Will you be my assistant editor?' he said calmly, whiffing a cigar.

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'That's scarcely romantic,' I insisted.

'No, but it's business. Minza, there's no foolishness about me. I am dead in earnest. You're my only hope in life; will you be my wife? That rhymes. It's not a great distinction, but then——' and his voice died away, as if in thought.

There was nothing impulsive about it, and the memory of Tim's defiant look flashed on me.

'Yes,' I said; and he kissed me without further argument.

Of course it was not such a courtship as I had dreamed of; but I thought, as girls have to be married some time, I might as well make a beginning.

I knew Bob loved his mother, was kind, pure, and noble in heart; and I gave him my hand.

'You make me so happy, Minza!'

Just then Jimmy came in crying, with a splinter in his toe, and it stopped further love-making.

Father and mother arrived earlier than I had expected, right in the middle of my preparations to welcome them. What a happy meeting! I hugged mother and little Tod till they fairly gasped, and father looked so ruddy and strong! Mother, bless her heart! was young again. There was the old love sparkle in her eyes, the dimple had come once more into her cheek, and we were very happy that night! Little Tod had grown as tall as Jimmy, and was as saucy as a parrot.

Mother sang many of her old songs.

'There, Meggie, is Helen Martin when a lonely young Englishman fell in love with her,' father remarked, looking at her fondly.

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'Oh, the hollowed glow of a happy heart!
Nor wealth nor fame can banish its lustre.'

Such a busy time mother and I had talking! She told me of Paris, of the Crystal Palace, of Covent Garden; and inspired me still further with that great ambition which I could never resist—to be a great prima donna.

Her trunk was full of little presents for us all, and a generous supply of guide-books, photos, and souvenirs. The twelve hundred and seventy-six dollars and sixty cents was gone, and we were still one thousand dollars in debt; but let the creditors whistle now: we were happy.

'They shall be paid, but they must cultivate patience,' said mother, smiling.

She was soon actively at work organizing new music classes, and having been 'abroad,' she enjoyed an unrivaled prestige.

'Now, my Minza must study to go abroad too,' said mother enthusiastically one day.

'No, mother, I never can leave you.'

'But, my child, your voice, when cultivated, will bring you fortune and fame.'

'I want neither, now we are happy; besides—besides—I'm—I'm—going to be—married!'

'Minza!' gasped mother. 'All our hopes are dashed. O Minza! how could you do it, and not let me know? Cannot it be——'

'Mamma, it is settled,' I replied.

Father came in just then, having overheard us. He was thunderstruck.

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'My little girl, only seventeen, and talking of being married!'

I was glad they knew it now.

'And to Tim?' continued mother inquiringly.

That question cut me and I felt myself growing pale.

'No—he has married Angela.'

'My dear girl, and you——'

With a mother's quick eye she read it all.

'No, mother; it's to Bob Burnette, the dearest, best fellow on earth. You'll love him, and he'll soon pay that one thousand dollars,' I continued, trying to be enthusiastic.

'My daughter,' continued mother sternly, 'have you sold yourself again for us?'

'Oh, no, you'll like Bob, mother; in fact, you must like him.'

But she never did. She looked upon him as a robber.

Bob called soon after, and father tried to be cheerful and entertaining as a prospective father-in-law; mother was cold and reserved, but she never remonstrated again with me.

Poor Bob! I saw he felt it, and I pitied him the more, and admired his manly ways; for Bob was a splendid type of pure manhood, and that is saying a great deal in these days, when so many young men, 'after sowing their wild oats,' finish by marrying innocent girls.

We were busy with the preparations for the marriage. Bob had established his newspaper in Dakota,

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and we were to be married in October and go there to live.

It was a hard trial to mother, as it is to all mothers to give up their daughters just when they find so much comfort in their companionship. I could scarcely realize it to be true. A girl about to be married has the great problem of her life and destiny before her.

We were to be married in the dear old church, and the night before I wandered down to the old limekiln. The leaves were falling, the autumn foliage enveloped the old trees I loved so well. It was now a real farewell. I came to them as a girl—to-morrow I stepped into wifehood.

Bob met me at the gate when I returned.

'What, pet! so sad before your wedding-day?'

'Yes, you do not know what a girl gives up when she is married, and——'

'Minza,' he said, his honest eyes looking deep into mine, 'I will not take a captive. I love you—my life is yours—married or not married. We were born for each other.'

Oh, why didn't he rage, and fume, and fight, as they do on the stage or in story-books, when they are in love? It was his perfect perfection that I did not admire—but his honest, warm heart was so true!

The dear old minister, the Rev. Mr. Frazer, came from a distant charge to marry us. The ceremony was short, and our clasped hands trembled as a response when the final words were pronounced.

The 'Wedding March' was played as we walked out of the church, but it seemed like a funeral dirge.

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Alone together, Bob grasped me.

'My own Minza! My wife now!'

The realization burst upon me—a wife!

At the wedding supper everyone seemed sad. Mother's eyes were red, and she could scarcely speak.

Mother and daughter were drifting—drifting apart!

The little old station platform was thronged with friends to see us off; the train was an hour late, which made it rather awkward for me. 'Will it never come?' I thought, as a curious crowd pushed forward to 'see the bride.'

Neither Tim nor Angela was there, though they had stood in the back part of the church during the ceremony.

Sister of childhood and love's own sweetheart! and no farewell from either!

A shower of rice and old shoes made the occupants of the car look at us as museum curiosities.

'Now, we won't act like a bridal couple, will we, Bob?' I whispered.

'No,' he said heroically, trying to look as unconcerned as an old married man. But it did not last long. I soon fell asleep in his arms, dreaming of those dear ones at home.

In a short time I learned to say 'My husband,' but 'Bob' always sounded better.

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CHAPTER XVI.

In ordinary romantic careers the marriage is the climax, and 'they lived happily ever after.' In my life, marriage was where real life began.

We arrived at Fargo, Dakota, during a light snowfall, with the wind whistling a dismal song about the car. The landscape was dreary, and made me feel homesick, but Bob's cheeriness was irresistible.

Yes, I was a wife.

We traveled up the broad Red River Valley, dotted with shanties on each quarter section of land, and stacks of grain which looked like Esquimaux snow-houses. We stopped at many straggling and deserted little stations, with elevators and grain warehouses clustered about hungry-looking lumber and coal yards. We arrived at Boomtown at last. There were three or four handsome brick buildings and a large hotel in the village. Bob's office sign, 'The Weekly Times,' blazed out in bright gold letters from a neat-looking little wooden shanty. We drove there first. It was not an inspiring sight. A yellow-haired Swedish boy with an ink-smeared face sat perched on a stool, 'throwing in' type. The old Washington hand-press, with its fierce-looking lever, was in one corner, with the gravestone ink-slab at the side. All the walls were

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frescoed with inky finger-daubs, and decorated with faded circus and show lithographs and 'dates.'

There was a frightful odor of benzine about the room, and the old job presses looked as if they were hungry for a form to squeeze.

The residents of Boomtown were an unusually intelligent and bright class of people, and gave us a very cordial welcome. The burden of conversation, day and night, was 'Boomtown's great future—when the new railroad arrived.'

Bob showed me the flaming maps indicating Boomtown as quite the centre of the universe, and we had a glorious future painted for us in our fancy.

The wild blizzards, raging that winter for days at a time, made our life rather dreary and lonesome; but I soon became quite an accomplished editor's wife, addressing the wrappers and papers on publication days, mixing the paste, and picking up the local current gossip, as follows:—

'Mrs. Mayor Snoddus drove out yesterday with Mrs. Biff.'

'Mrs. Jones went to Babtown in the afternoon, and was accompanied by Hon. Fillipers Jones.'

'Miss Sally Snippuns has a bad whitlow on her left hand.'

'Mr. Joe Waterlog has been under the weather a few days this week.'

Do you laugh at this as silly? It is much the same news as London newspapers give concerning royalty. In America, merit is worshipped as an aristocracy; the people are the royalty, and each little country paper has its court of patrons to look after.

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The best crop raised in Dakota is not wheat, but politics. The long winter evenings, spent by the men hugging red-hot stoves are certain to breed mischief. The lone settler on the dreary plains!—God help his poor wife! No wonder the insane asylums are filled with 'only a farmer's wife.' The tedious monotony or their existence must be crazing, and this isolation accounts for much of the discontent among American farmers. In Europe they cluster in villages, and, man being naturally a social being, the convivial greeting alleviates the monotony of his existence, and makes him more contented than his American cousin.

In the early days of its first settlement, Boomtown had been located at the county seat of Halkins County. Since then a second large railroad corporation had extended a branch of their line into the southern part of the county, and located there a terminal town site, which was owned by officials of the railroad. These branch corporations and wrecking schemes, with their inflated water stock bubbles, account for many of the large fortunes gathered so quickly by American railroad magnates.

The new town of Courtville was named after one of the magnates, and it aspired to take the county seat away from Boomtown. A flaw was discovered in the first proceedings in establishing the county seat, and a fight was made in the legislature at Bismarck to get a special law passed to re-submit the matter to a vote of the people. The plot was, that in extending its line the railroad corporation could import enough sovereign American voters—that is, ignorant Italians and others,

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temporary railroad laborers—to carry the election and secure the county seat.

Boomtown was aroused; and as Bob was looked upon as a leader in public matters, we were to go tc Bismarck to try and check the infamous legislation. After we arrived, Bob made a careful poll of the members of the legislature, in order to learn who were for and who were against the scheme. He found the railroad represented by a powerful and wealthy lobby party, and struggled along; while I tried to assist by influencing the legislators at the Governor's receptions. But ladies are not the power in American affairs of state that they were in the days of the Bourbons in France.

Champagne suppers were given by the lobby party, and each side competed for every doubtful vote. The critical time was drawing near. Bob polled his votes every day, and at this time there were two majority on our side against the bill. On the day for the final voting, I went to the State House, through a blinding blizzard, and sat in the galleries, almost the only lady present.

'If we can keep our men in line, we are all right,' said Bob excitedly.

The 'ayes' and 'nays' were called. There was breathless silence. I was about to leave—satisfied that Boomtown was victorious—when I saw two of our men slip quietly out at a side door. I rushed down into the corridor, and in the dark corners saw the portly lobbyist, Colonel Malsey, who represented the railroad, hand both of the men a roll suspiciously like bank-notes. They quietly slipped back to their seats,

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but the lobbyist never appeared in the hall. The names of these two were reached near the end of the roll-call.

'Yea,' responded one.

'Yea,' echoed the other.

Boomtown was defeated by its own neighbors—representatives from an adjoining county.

The Boomtown men cried, 'Bribery!' An investigation was ordered, and Colonel Malsey was implicated; but he proved an *alibi* by seven reputable witnesses that he had not been near the State House on the day the vote was taken.

I knew he lied; but what was a woman's word against seven 'reputable' witnesses? I never told Bob about seeing Colonel Malsey, and was very happy when we left Bismarck that night.

The election occurred the following autumn. Bob travelled miles and miles over the prairie country behind broncho ponies, visiting each farmer and voter personally, and, sometimes, I am afraid, like the opposing side, gave them a taste from his bottle of 'cold tea.' I remained in the office meantime editing the paper, and facing irate readers whom Bob had 'blistered' in the previous issue. It was an exciting time. The outlook was bright for Boomtown winning, as it was more centrally situated in the county than Courtville.

Election day arrived, and never can I forget how pale and wan Bob looked as the fatal day approached. He owned an interest in Boomtown town site, and it was a battle for his home and all that he possessed. He mortgaged the printing office to raise money for

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the campaign. The organization was thought to be perfect, as Boomtown men were stationed at every polling precinct on the day of election to watch the enemy and our interests.

The returns came in slowly that night, but we felt that victory was certain to be ours. It was at Courtville itself, with its alien railroad voters, that the foe was most feared; but they had been checked by the Boomtown challengers. Everyone was gleeful, and Bob was cheered as he delivered an address from the front of his office on a farmer's wagon. Bonfires were lighted in the streets, and it was altogether a night of rejoicing, as the result had been received from every precinct except the Waney district in the extreme north part of the county, which was, of course, supposed to have given an almost solid vote for Boomtown.

In the midst of the rejoicing a courier arrived from the Waney district.

'One hundred and four against us—sold by the sneaks!'

This, if true, turned the scale. The news soon flashed over the village. The alien railroad voters had been quietly sent armed in squads to that precinct—a flank movement—and the Boomtown challengers had been bribed.

'Contest it!' 'Hang the traitors!' were the cries on the street.

Well, it was contested. Injunctions and mandamus were issued. There was talk of armed resistance with guns against removal, but it ended in Courtville securing the county seat; and the handsome seventeen-

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thousand dollar court-house remains to-day a rendezvous for Boomtown bats and swallows. The town is now almost deserted, with its handsome brick buildings and large hotel, a fit theme for a new Goldsmith's 'Deserted Village.'

It was a paralyzing blow to poor Bob.

'There is one consolation, Minza.'

'And what's that dear?'

'I sent your father the one thousand dollars first. He's out of debt.'

'O Bob! dear fellow, you've ruined yourself for them!'

'No, no, a young man is never ruined by reverses while he has health.'

He allowed the dear old office that I had grown to love to go to sale under the hammer on a foreclosed mortgage, and we sought new fields to conquer.

The wind howled dismally the night we left. It was in December, and our friends at Boomtown—for misfortune reveals your true friends—bid us Godspeed. We started for a new 'city' on Lake Superior that was booming.

Now Bob found in me a helpmate—if ever there was one; but where husband and wife mingle in the same business or trade there is bound to be a clash at times. I must confess it, I promised to 'obey' him; but there were times when I thought he could obey me with better grace. After a little quiet cry the domestic sky would clear.

'It's just such snivelling as this that drives men to the bad and makes them seek other companionship, and drink,' said Bob.

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This was his standard argument.

After all, I look back on my first year of married life in Dakota as happy, although it was fraught with rugged experience.

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CHAPTER XVII.

As we link together the memories of our life, the impressive events seem to fit into connected grooves. Incident follows incident, without reference to the lapse of time.

It was with some misgiving that Robert and I took up our abode at another 'growing town.' The 'boom era' in America is spasmodic, and travels in waves. It is a result of the speculative fever that has always been characteristic of American business methods. The evolution of a Western American town is an interesting study. First, the town plot and the corner lot speculation, before the least indication of a building is visible; then some great factory, railroad shops, or industrial interests centre there, about which a large city is to 'grow.' The building operations start on a given day, rough board shanties springing up like magic over-night. Then comes the struggle to determine the 'business portion' of the new town. Rival districts put up large buildings to 'draw it.' Next follow the churches, and even these sacred structures are placed with an idea of 'selling lots,' by the real-estate dealer. Municipal organization, streets, sidewalks, sewers, water supply, and paving are the succeeding problems in the evolution. Later, the wooden

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shanties give way to brick 'blocks,' and a spirit of 'bigger and bigger' rivalry begins, until the town becomes a 'city,' and boasts of parks and a 'fine opera-house,' palatial school-houses and court-houses, a Board of Trade, and a 'boodle' alderman.

Town politics naturally fall into the hands of the rougher element, who, through 'public contracts' and winked-at privileges, strengthen themselves into a favored circle, and a Tammany Hall is originated in every growing American town, which holds the balance of power between the principal political parties.

This I observed as an editor's wife.

At Dunbar, our new home, Bob secured a situation as city editor on a daily newspaper. In a sharp and bitter local political struggle politicians belonging to the same party fell out, and one faction desired to start a newspaper as their 'organ,' with Bob as editor. They made up a liberal subscription as a bonus, and in a short time the new paper was launched.

'Well, Minza, I have a daily newspaper now,' said Bob one day.

This was the first intimation I had received of Bob's ambitions in that direction.

'Aren't you afraid it won't pay, Bob?'

'Pay! I have everything to gain, and can't lose much,' he replied.

I assisted every day at the office, Bob filling the position of editor, business manager, compositor, foreman, reporter, and proof reader on the struggling new paper. It was a tremendous strain on him; he was hardly civil to me, so absorbed was he in his business. I became more an *employee* than a wife. The change

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in him had come on gradually since our reverses in Dakota.

Dunbar, besides being a growing and prosperous manufacturing center, was also a famous resort for tourists. The trout fishing and hunting in 'forests primeval' were great attractions. Among the tourists who visited the large hotel, 'Minnehaha,' every summer was a Henry Orglive, a prominent theatrical manager. Bob had received a large order from him for printing, and had urged him to visit our home.

'Minza, do be more sociable to my friends. It's business, you know. Brush up your music and sing him a song.'

Mr. Orglive took tea with us the following week. He was a tall handsome man with a heavy moustache. After tea I played and sang. He accompanied me in my violin selections, and we were naturally drawn together by the affinity expressed in music. I was hungry for companionship in the art in which I had been nursed from earliest childhood.

Bob sat in a corner and slept, because his musical taste had not improved since our marriage, although I had done my best to educate him.

We continued to play until late, and in parting Mr. Orglive gave me a look that every woman understands, and a smile that expressed more.

'I have enjoyed the evening very much, Mr. Burnette, and shall want to come again. Mrs. Burnette is a charming musician,' said Mr. Orglive to Bob as he was leaving.

'Glad to hear it—glad to hear it,' said Bob rather sleepily, as he showed him to the door.

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When Bob returned to the room he glowered upon me with the ferocity of a wild beast.

'You thought I was asleep, but I wasn't.'

'What is it, Robert?' I asked innocently.

'Oh, you know; you needn't look so simple,' he retorted.

This roused my temper. I slammed the piano cover down with a bang and turned out the gas.

That made him worse; and here was

> 'The little rift within the lute,
> That by and by will make the music mute,
> And ever widening slowly silence all.'

The incidents of this night and Bob's anger created in me an admiration for Mr. Orglive which otherwise might never have existed.

But Bob would not permit him to come to our house again, and guarded me like a keeper.

A new resort hotel was opened a fortnight later with a grand ball, and Bob coolly ordered me to go.

'It's a matter of business, so be careful how you act.'

Poor fellow, I thought his mind must be giving way under the strain of business anxieties. I had a good cry while dressing.

'That's right! snivel away!' he taunted.

My silence irritated him. We drove to the ball, and as I came out of the dressing-room I met Mr. Orglive.

'So charmed to see you Mrs. Burnette. I've rather taken charge of affairs to-night, seeing that I am a stockholder in this new hotel, and you're to sing for us.'

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'But I've no music,' I replied.

'I have,' he said quickly. 'I bought those pieces you sang for me the other evening. I never can forget——'

Just then Bob came up, and his face was fairly livid.

I tried to excuse myself.

'Don't you sing to-night, or you will regret it,' whispered Bob hoarsely.

This aroused all the tiger in me.

'I will,' I replied defiantly.

I was afraid our actions had been observed and would make a scene, so I hurried away from him.

My songs were announced after the first lancers, and I did not dance, so as to save my breath. Mr. Orglive presided at the piano, and his introductory chords indicated a masterly player. The whole past seemed to come back, and passionately and defiantly I sang the songs he handed me. I had not sung before a Dunbar audience previously to this, and it created something of a sensation.

'Is that Mrs. Burnette?' 'Really now, what a beautiful singer!' were the whispered remarks I overheard as I took my seat.

Congratulations were pouring in when Mr. Orglive gave me his arm, and escorted me from the Concert Hall.

In the corner of the cloak room I saw Bob, crouching like a tiger, with his face telling the horrid story of jealousy. Of course everyone must have noticed him, and I felt quite disgraced.

'Will you take me home?' I whispered.

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'No,' he hissed back.

Mr. Orglive at the door must have overheard us.

'May I have this waltz?' said Mr. Orglive, advancing as the music was resumed.

I hesitated. I had not danced since our marriage, and with a desperate shrug I answered 'Yes.'

That waltz I never can forget. How kind—how gentle he was to me! How it contrasted with the boorishness of Bob! His arm about me assumed a protection as we glided in the fascination of a dream. I went back to Bob, who still clung to the corner.

'Take me home, Robert,' I said.

He got up lazily, as if bored, and went to the cloak-room, and as I was in the corridor waiting for him, Mr. Orglive came out of the dancing-room, wiping the perspiration from his brow, after a vigorous polka with Mrs. Goundy, who was very stout.

'I must see you again,' he said in a low tone of voice.

Bob heard it as he came out of the cloak-room, and the two men glared at each other a minute, and parted stiffly.

How miserable I was after the ball! Scarcely a word was spoken between us. I took off my ball dress and sat by the open grate praying—praying to God. A miserable, unhappy girl-wife!

Matters did not mend, and it seemed as if the rift was widening, and we were drifting farther and farther apart. Bob would stay out late at night, and I feared further trouble; he was so completely unlike his old self.

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One evening he came home to dinner in a rather more cheerful frame of mind than usual. I was surprised. But it was a leering, sarcastic laugh he gave as he said:

'Now you'll love me again as a wife should;' and he threw down a large yellow envelope. 'Read it,' he continued.

I did so mechanically. It was a letter from a New York firm of lawyers. One sentence was enough.

'Your claim to the two hundred thousand dollars from the Ferguson estate in Scotland is established.'

I read no more.

'You're to be congratulated,' I said rather languidly.

'So that's the way my years of trouble and work are received? Damn a woman, anyhow! I'll go back to balloons.'

This was a straw that broke my temper again.

'Keep your money!—I don't want it; I'm going home.'

This seemed to sober him.

'Minza, don't go mad,' he cried, coaxingly, coming towards me.

'I have decided,' I said firmly.

'But think of the scandal!' he implored.

'Better that than live in torture.'

It looked for a time as if there might be a reconciliation, but the flood-tide was past.

'Well, Minza, I am an aëronaut, and I'll soar—soar—then you'll want to see me' he growled as he left the room.

This last remark flashed the truth on me. Had

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Bob gone mad? It was a terrible thought, and I did not dare to breathe a word of my suspicions, as the gossips would say I wanted to deprive him of his fortune, and ordinarily he seemed rational enough; but now all this talk of balloons had its significance.

It was announced in the paper the next day that I was to visit my home in Iowa. Bob sold the newspaper soon after, and was pressed on all sides with advice as to how to invest his money. How many moth-like friends the glare of wealth will bring! They found his weakness—balloons!

He did not seem to realize my determination that it should be a final separation. I had no power or influence with him. He sent money to the Smithville Bank to my credit, and gave me a purse when we parted. It was like kissing a dead person when I bid him 'Good-bye.' I tried to confide my fears as to Bob's mind to friends; but they were all suspicious, and thought I wanted Bob's money.

I felt little regret at leaving Dunbar. The beautiful bay, which was an arm of Lake Superior, was placid and serene, the large pine, spruce, and hemlock trees making a rich purple horizon fringe on the opposite shore. The little group of islands glistened like emeralds from the cliff as the city faded from view. Even the scattered stumps and red mucky clay seemed to add artistic beauty to the scene. The dismal landscape of burnt pine-stumps and log clearings indicated the fury of forest fires where many a poor settler had lost his life.

Again the same old evil star followed me. The

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factory whistles just then sounded in a chorus that echoed among the hills.

It was a Minor Chord.

Of course people would talk, but let them talk! My whole life had been public talk. One restless night on the Pullman sleeping-car, I dreamed of Bob and his balloons, and when I awoke I was at Smithville.

Dear old home! Every time I returned, it awakened new sensations.

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CHAPTER XVIII.

WHILE I did not feel that our separation was permanent, I knew that all our happiness as man and wife was at an end. I felt it my duty to cling to him, and had it not been for the cursed fortune it would have been easier.

What a home getting it was! I felt something of a prodigal. The letters from home had been rather irregular and had been growing more formal; but when I saw the dear old house with green blinds nestling in the middle of the road I felt that one thing had been accomplished—we were not one thousand dollars in debt—and this brought back a tender memory of Bob's generosity. Was I really an ungrateful creature?

I expected to find poverty and sadness in the old home, but there was peace, plenty, and happiness. It seemed as if I was quite unnecessary.

'Minza, Minza, my child!' cried mother as she rushed out.

Father came in from the garden. Jimmy gave me a real young brother's hug, and Tod waved his Fourth of July flag in exultation.

Yes, they were glad to see me, and how my hungry,

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love-famished heart leaped for joy! There is always a feeling of refuge in home—where enemies and jealousies of life cannot intrude.

At mother's knee I sat as I did when a child and told her all between my sobs.

'My dear, dear Minza! why didn't you write to me?'

'I couldn't, mother; my secret sorrows seemed as sacred to me as my prayers.'

'Well, dear, you are home now; let's forget it. You know I trembled for my daughter even when we heard of your prosperity. You decided too hastily, and I always thought if we had not gone to Europe I should have saved you the hasty and fatal step.'

'But, mother, Bob was good as long as——' I broke down again.

'Yes, perhaps the poor fellow overtaxed his brain, and it may come out all right yet. Let us have some tea and music.'

Her cheerfulness was infectious, and we were soon singing the old duets.

As I received letters regularly with money from Bob, there was little talk in the village; but when my stay lengthened out into months and months, and he never came to visit me, there was a ripple of curiosity over the neighborhood.

In the autumn I received the following note from Bob, dated at Shelbyville:—

'Dear Minza:—Mother died Friday, and was buried this morning; there is nothing for me to live for now. I am going to Europe next week to climb the Alps in

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my new balloon, which I have named after you. We have organized a scientific expedition. I may meet you in heaven. Good-bye.

'BOB.'

Yes, there was no doubt of it now. He was crazy. I decided to go to Shelbyville that night. I thought my duty as a wife demanded it, and determined to go with him.

As I was about to step on to the train a telegram was handed me from New York:—

'I sail to-morrow; you cannot go. Your heart is too heavy for the balloon.

'BOB.'

With all the cunning of a madman he seemed to have divined my purpose. I tried to stop him with a telegram to the authorities in New York; but even they, after an examination, permitted him to sail, and evidently thought me a scheming wife, anxious only for his money. The letter I received later stated:—

'Dear Madam:—I take pleasure in stating that Robert Burnette is of sound mind, and no more insane than any of our eminent scientists and investigators, and that the trip will not only add valuable truths to scientific lore, but improve his health as well.

'J. M. BARTLETT, M. D.'

I watched eagerly for the safe arrival of the steamer. Later I received long, interesting, and endearing letters from Bob; but the balloon always came first, and he was generous in his allowance of money.

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'But, I shall not send you too much money at one time, as you might run away in another man's balloon.'

This was an excerpt from one of his letters.

Some months had elapsed when I received a letter from him announcing the great aërial voyage he was to undertake that day in his new air-ship. His fortune must have dwindled under the enormous expense of his aërial expeditions, but he was always hopeful.

'When I visit Mars and return, we'll go there to live, Minza.'

'The new ship is a beauty.'

So cunningly were these passages interwoven in the correspondence that the authorities deemed the irrational portions simply 'jokes' when I made a legal effort to restrain him in his wild purposes.

He was to make his great ascent on my birthday. How eagerly I watched the cablegrams in the papers! The event attracted world-wide attention as a noble self-sacrifice for science. The balloon ascended with my husband.

'The great air-ship "Minza" faded away into the merest speck, and seemed to sink into the blue sea of the skies,' read the graphic account. This was the last I heard of poor Bob. Whether I was now a widow or a wife, I knew not.

Of course, I naturally supposed that his will was made, and that there would be no trouble about the property if there was any left; but I was mistaken. Bob had disappeared in a foreign country, and, as the authorities had no positive evidence of his death, they

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refused to probate a wife's claim to his money. Even the life insurance companies refused to pay the indemnity.

A husband in the air!

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CHAPTER XIX.

ONCE again the problem of earning a living confronted me. I could not allow mother or father to support me. Mother fired me with ambition.

'Take what you have, and study for the stage, Minza. You are growing beautiful, my dear, and your early training will not come amiss,' said mother.

Another of those old-time family consultations, and as usual, mother's advice prevailed.

In another week I was to leave for Boston and resume my musical studies. My life's mission then began in earnest, although every day I expected some tidings from Bob.

The day before I was to start I felt dizzy and my system gave way. Dr. Waddington was called. Mother soon had me in bed. The old doctor felt my cheek, took my temperature and counted my pulse.

'Hum, hum—typhoid fever,' he said, in as matter-of-fact a way as if it had been the mumps.

That night I was raving and delirious. Mother told me it was all about Bob and the balloons.

' Poor little Minza—a wife or widow? ' was the last thing I remember mother saying. They thought I was going to die, but I didn't.

Naturallly my illness interfered with all plans for

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the future, but as soon as I was able to sit up I began to map out my campaign. Getting well was a tedious business, but somehow time wheels around the days and months just as regularly one season as another. The fear of losing my voice proved groundless—in fact, is seemed to strengthen and improve; but my red hair all came out, and left me quite bald.

Horrors! Was I to be a bald-headed woman?

It began to grow gently again, and I left for Boston with a soft amber down covering my head, over which I wore a generous and flowing blonde wig.

As I was entering the train I saw a familiar form stooping under the weight of heavy valises. It was Fred Burroughes. He did not recognize me, and I spoke to him and he looked up in surprise.

'What, Minza!—and where are you going?'

We got on to the train together, and I told him my story.

Of course this incident gave Smithville gossips something more to talk about, and mother was enlightened with the information that I had eloped with Fred Burroughes.

Poor fellow! He was my first benefactor.

His mother had died recently, and he, too, had been ill for nearly a year past, as his pale face indicated.

We were in the middle of an interesting conversation when he arose abruptly.

'I must get off here, Minza,' he said with a sad look in his eyes. Oh, if I could only help you——'

'Hush! Fred Burroughes, it is I who should help you now. Write to me, will you?' I said cheerily.

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'Minza, I'm married. This is my home, and——'

'All aboard!' shouted the burly conductor, and the rest of Fred's words were lost in the roar of the train.

It seems as if old friends drift apart when absent from each other. New associations uproot old acquaintance. Poor Fred! was his married life as unhappy as mine had been?

In Boston again! It all seemed familiar to me now. With my old teacher, Professor Windermere, I plunged into my musical studies. He remembered every weakness and peculiarity of my early singing and gave them special attention. When I announced my determination to study opera, he shook his head dolefully.

'Your voice is too weak—not full enough for these great opera houses; and then you'll have to learn to act. No, Minza, I don't want you to chase a false hope. Study to be a teacher, and rest content.'

'My mother said I was to be an opera prima donna, and I am going to aim for that,' I replied decidedly.

'All right, my dear; but remember the warning I gave you.'

My means were limited, and to secure additional instruction in stage work I accepted a position in the mantle department of a large draper's, serving as a model to try on the garments for lady customers. It brought me a steady income, and I continued there for some time; but at the end of the year I found my funds almost entirely exhausted, except for the little savings sent me by mother and the small salary from the shop.

I made application to sing the solo parts in 'The Creation' at the coming May Festival. It was auda-

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cious in me, but the conductor, having had the usual row with prima donnas, accepted me as a revenge on the unconquerable primas.

The unknown soloist! The public were on the *qui vive*. I rehearsed hours and hours with the conductor, and he finally expressed himself rather reluctantly as 'pleased' with his newly discovered soprano.

The day of the festival arrived. The choruses of Haydn never seemed so heaven-inspired before. My voice acted rather poorly at first, but when I came to the cooing-dove passage I tried to 'coo,' and throw my soul into that dove, which I could almost feel hovering near me.

The effect was electrical. The people broke out in one solid cheer. The simple and truthful shading of the passage had touched the responsive chord in that great audience.

The entire oratorio was given with splendid expression, and the conductor was showered with congratulations. He pushed his way through the singers to where I was surrounded by admiring acquaintances. His shining bald head seemed to reflect the beaming smile on his face.

'Your fame is made, madame. Don't hesitate to begin on your *repertoire* at once. You have my everlasting gratitude: you have saved me a humiliation.'

The newspapers were very elaborate in their praise. The reporters called on me in profusion, and were quite surprised to realize that I thoroughly understood the workings of the editorial machines in grinding out 'matter.' They were my best friends, and I took pains to help them to 'good stories.' The old news-

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paper experience came back to me, and the pleasant hours I spent in receiving those handsome, keen, bright-eyed reporters I shall never forget.

Those who succeed in a public career seldom realize how much they owe to these irrepressible newspaper men.

In a few weeks I was known far and wide throughout America and properly christened with a stage name. Even the querulous criticism of the older critics, who never liked to agree with the younger ones, had its beneficial effect in making 'Madame Helvina' known to the musical world.

After this I began to develop a capacity for business. The oratorio engagement brought me numerous offers for concerts, although the income did not amount to much.

It was a newspaper man who solved the question of my future career—Mr. Howard Wittaker.

'You ought to go abroad at once, Madame Helvina.'

'Yes?' I replied questioningly.

'Well, I've an idea. Old James Bluffingame was captivated by your singing. I will negotiate a loan.'

'You're very kind, but be very careful——'

'But will you tell me the real story of your life?' he entreated.

'No, that's a secret; the past is dead to me. Please don't ask me.'

'Anything that you desire, madame—I am at your service,' he said, as he gallantly bowed himself out at the door.

An American newspaper man has a faculty of

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accomplishing results. I received a note a few days later:—

'Enclosed find cheque, two thousand dollars, sent by order Mr. James Bluffingame, who desires in return your personal note and photograph. Make the note due at the time most convenient to yourself.

'J. SMITH & SONS, Bankers.'

This was Howard's work.

I was unable to spare the money to visit my mother and the little Iowa home before I went abroad; and besides, mother wrote insisting: 'Start at once. You are growing old.' What! I growing old and only twenty! Yes, there were a few gray hairs. Anything but red hair! thought I.

The day of sailing soon arrived. The pier was crowded with people to see off friends and relatives. Flowers and bouquets were showered upon the parting passengers in profusion. The first bell sounded, and the 'Good-byes' began to flow with the tears. Mothers parting from sons, sweethearts from lovers, brothers from sisters, husbands from wives! Ah, how these partings made me shudder! There were none there to bid me 'Good-bye.' I stood alone looking over the rail as the cheers began and the hats and handkerchiefs waved from the pier. There were many red eyes among the passengers. The sobbing began with a crescendo and concluded with a staccato. The brass band struck up a lively air, as if to drown the grief, as the great boat backed out from the pier and steamed majestically through the forest of masts down New York Harbor.

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The last sound I heard from my native shore was the dismal echo of the bell-buoy as it swayed to and fro on the billows of the deep.

It struck a Minor Chord.

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CHAPTER XX.

SINCE the earliest Scriptural times, and the days of Jonah, various attempts have been made to describe a sea voyage. It is something that is so thoroughly felt that mere word-painting seems inadequate.

The genial old pilot—an ideal sea-dog—was lowered when we left Sandy Hook; he was laden with last messages to friends behind. When I handed him a letter for mother, I felt as if I were bound for Eternity. Once out of sight of land, the ocean appeared very calm, but the big steamer began rocking like a cradle. The 'feeling' came on insidiously, and I soon retired below, trying to smile as I left the friends on deck.

I had often sung about the deep blue sea, but had never realized what it was before. The blue is almost an indigo, and seems to color the white-crested foam in the vessel's wake like the blueing in mother's wash-tub.

The first day at sea is not always the most sociable of the voyage. There is a land reserve that needs to be driven away by the sea air. The bugle trumpet-call for meals is heard often—but at first few respond. In a few days the motion of the steamer begins to feel

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like the old swing at home, and you quite enjoy it. Concerts are given in the saloon as the patients are relieved from the hospital below. We learn in these few idle days in crossing the Atlantic more personal and biographical information from a fellow-passenger than he would be likely to relate otherwise in a lifetime. The company on board were very agreeable, and we began to feel like one large family, and conversed pleasantly on musical and literary matters. It was altogether very entertaining; but there is always someone whom you find most congenial. While there were many attractive and pleasant gentlemen on board, my fancy was quite taken with a lonesome, shy, fair-haired young man of twenty. No one seemed to take much notice of him, and his loneliness created a bond of sympathy between us, so that we were soon good friends.

'Aren't you a singer?' he asked, looking at me earnestly.

'I hope to be some day,' I replied.

'Yes, and I think you must be Madame Helvina. My mother heard you in "The Creation" in Boston, and she says you are going to be a great singer—and my mother is a musician.'

Bless his heart! He struck my weak point—mother-love—and I could have hugged him for those words.

'Who is your mother?' I asked, growing interested.

'A Polish woman. I am American born, and am going back to join my parents, who have returned to Poland. It's a poor place for musicians; but mother

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had the old home left her recently, and they have decided to go there to live.'

'Do you take after your mother and sing also?'

'No, I am simply a violinist.'

We passed many happy hours together. He played for my singing, and also sang in a beautiful, rich, robust tenor voice.

'Why don't you take up voice culture?' I asked, turning to him quickly.

'Because father hates singing. He was an operatic tenor once, and I suppose there is good reason for not wanting me to become a singer, although I love to sing.'

'Well, Gene,' said I, for that was his name, 'you must sing. Study the great art, for me!'

He took the matter rather seriously, and gave me a reflective look which indicated an underlying determination.

The men in the smoking-room continued their games until late at night, and during the day would make a wager on every possible incident which involved doubt—on the number of miles the ship would go, on how many vessels we would sight during the day, on fog or no fog; and it was carried to my ears by interested parties, that a wager was pending between two men, one of whom was known as 'Fuzzy-face,' as to whether or not I would kiss the fair-haired young man on parting.

Was I so much of a flirt? It provoked me, and I determined to frustrate their wager, so that neither side should win.

What a thrill passed over me as I first gazed on

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England, the home of my forefathers! Even the bleak, bare cliffs of Portland Bill seemed fascinating as we sailed up the Channel, past the Isle of Wight. What a great part in the world's history that little island has played!

At the landing, after the blue-capped Customs officer had finished the examination of his portmanteau, Gene Paroski turned about hurriedly to catch his train, which was waiting.

'Madame Helvina, I am going, and—and——'

He stood bashfully, cap in hand. I forgot my determination.

The fuzzy-faced passenger caught sight of us, and was unhappy. He had lost his wager.

'Don't forget that voice, and we'll sing together again some time, perhaps. Good-bye,' I said, as he hurried off.

He waved his hand to me and was gone.

It was my first meeting with one who I felt would become a famous tenor.

Was it my last?

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CHAPTER XXI.

LONDON! An American is at first disgusted, and later falls in love, with the great city. There is only one London on earth. The crush of vehicles, the lamp-post islands in the centre of the streets, Old Father Thames with the tide in and out, Trafalgar Square, Piccadilly Circus—it all rushes back in one gleam of memory. How I longed to visit the sights of London! but work, work, held me captive.

My grandfather lived a short distance from London, in one of the prettiest little villages in England, on the banks of the classic Thames. Dear old grandfather! He had seen seventy summers, and he was a typical jolly Englishman. His proverbial good-nature and contented mind were the secret of his long years.

'Welcome, Minza, welcome to Ashley! How like Robert you are!' he said, as he gave me a searching look on arrival.

We had never met, but there is something in blood relationship that is felt at first greeting.

I am afraid I was not so diligent in my studies at first as I should have been. I wandered down past the old bridge where father and his brothers had spent many happy days in youth. Lord Tonquay's old

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place, with its high wall, Stompy Pond, Birwood Park, the old inns, all had their history. I revelled in ancestral scenes. The old churchyard, with moss-covered gravestones and epitaphs, among which I found the resting-place of my great-great-grandmother — all this was entrancing to an American. The sight of my name in such a place thrilled me. I found among the old records in the vestry, in faded ink, the date of father's christening.

Every evening grandfather sat in the ivy-covered porch in the long summer twilight. One evening, when I had just finished singing for him, I came out and kissed that dear old face.

'Grandpa, who were our ancestors?' I asked, sitting down at his knee.

This question naturally expresses the curiosity of all American girls. Of course, they do not care for ancient and noble lineage; but they would "like to know' just for curiosity.

'They do say,' said grandpa reflectively, with a twinkle in his eye, 'that many of our very ancient ancestors are buried in Cornwall, and that they were a branch of Lord Grundy's family.'

'Ah, but who were we before that, as far back as the time of William the Conqueror?' I continued inquisitively.

'My dear Minza,' said grandfather, as if beginning a long narrative, 'my memory does not run back quite so far as that. However, the dove and the linnet is our coat of arms.'

'But who were our ancestors?

'You inquisitive little minx! And do you want to

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know the real truth? As an American, the question of ancestry ought not to interest you to any great extent.'

'Well, I should like to know, grandpa—out of curiosity, you know.'

'Oh, indeed! Well, Minza, the first Maxwell that we have any trace of in the genealogical investigations was—a Cornish pirate!'

'A pirate!' I gasped.

'Just so—ha, ha, ha!' and he laughed heartily at my discomfiture.

This revelation paralyzed my curiosity, and I asked no further questions and ceased the pursuit of the pedigree.

The next day a regatta was given at Ashley-on the-Thames. The morning was wet, but in England everything starts punctually, and the first race was called at 9:30, during a heavy shower, by firing a pistol. It was a single-scull race. The contestants were brawny fellows, and their bare knees seemed higher than their heads as they pulled the long narnow scull, almost bounding through the water. It was a close and exciting race, and a shot fired when the first boat crossed the line announced the finish. Later in the day the river filled up with steam launches from London and rowing-boats from neighboring towns. There were also many punts, which resemble the Venetian gondola, and are pushed along by means of a long pole. It was altogether a gala day, and the broad English spoken almost made me feel as if I were in a foreign land: I could scarcely understand a word.

When the race between the Ashley Eights and

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the Rushtons was called, there was great excitement. It was the event of the day. All craned their necks to see the contest between the rival towns. The Ashley crew wore blue and the Rushtons red. I was out in the middle of the river in a boat, with grandpa's young gardener lad to look after me. My fancy chose the blues as favorite. I stepped on the seat of the boat to obtain a better view of them as they passed by on their way to the starting-post. I turned too far—a splash—and I was in the water.

Oh, the thoughts that flashed through my mind in those few seconds! The leader of the Ashley blues jumped from his seat, nearly upsetting his comrades in the scull, and soon had me safely on shore. How awkward and disgraced I felt as I stood looking at him, with my skirts dripping with water!

'Are you all right?' he asked of me, as the crowd pushed forward.

'Yes, thanks,' I said, trying to make the best of my appearance.

'Let me help you home,' he said, as I started for the house, which fortunately was near by.

'Don't let me hinder the race,' I protested.

'Bother the race!' he said, walking by my side. 'They must wait.'

'How can I ever thank you?' I said, as he turned away from the gate.

'Oh, never mind! See that you don't catch cold from your bath. I'll call to-morrow, if I may, to see how you are.

He raised his cap, and was gone.

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'Well, well, my girl, what's this?' said grandpa, coming to meet me and thumping his cane.

'Fell overboard, grandpa.'

'What! and where is James? Are you wet?' he said, touching my dripping gown. 'Well, I never! go and change your things, and come and have a cup o' tea.'

Some of the young ladies in the neighborhood were so cruel as to remark: 'Ah! that's the way of these impudent American girls; that's how they catch our handsome young men. They fall overboard and are fished out. They are always fishing.'

The Ashley blues won. Mr. Waldie, for that was my rescuer's name, came to tell me so that evening; and he smoked his pipe with grandpa on the porch, and listened while I sang.

On parting, he looked at me very sentimentally, and held my hand quite too long, I thought.

'Good-night, Mr. Waldie,' I said lightly. 'I wish my husband were here to thank my rescuer.'

He let go my hand rather suddenly, and left me with a hurried 'Good-night.'

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CHAPTER XXII.

EVERY morning, as the dear old landscape of Ashley and the Thames opened to my eyes, it seemed like a continued dream. The coaches from London were laden with merry throngs of tourists, and I began to envy them. The purpose of my life was beginning to be a burden to me; there are times when we reflect, 'Is it worth all the struggle?' But I had determined to consecrate my life to the musical art, and like the prize-fighter, the gymnast, the author, the barrister, or even any trade or profession, there must be a 'going into training'— a sacrifice, an absence from the usual luxuries, a drudgery of apprenticeship. Nothing comes without effort.

In another week I was to be on my way to Milan to complete my studies in *repertoire*. The young 'Ashley Blue,' Mr. Waldie, would persist in calling frequently, and I could not be rude to such a handsome young fellow. Of course, I may have made dimples at him; but then, you know, he saved my life. My woman's intuition told me that he kept his eyes too much on me when we were alone together.

'I am going on the Continent too. May I see you there?' he softly whispered, as we were about to part under the dear old oak trees in the park.

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Men have a way of putting a woman on the defensive. His eyes were eloquent. Why are men always falling in love?

'No. I must work, with all my concentrated energy. No more pleasure now. Some day we may meet again,' I said firmly.

'Some day!' he echoed sadly.

How many hundreds of people we meet and then part from to meet 'some day!' But life's current seldom drifts them together again.

On my journey to Milan I met many family parties traveling about with nothing in view but pleasure. Pleasure—pleasure—their mission in life! Their happy faces always made me feel a keen home-sickness, and to long for that sweet-faced little mother in Iowa.

The busy portions of our life are always the most difficult to describe. My studies that winter were simply a concrete mass of hard work. I was up early, and spent the day trying to master the Italian language, until even the drudgery of scales and exercises came as a positive relief.

How hungry I was for one word of English—with the real American accent!

Oh, those dear old Italian teachers! They inspired me with the real love of music. An Italian has a passion for music that no other nationality possesses. The trills bothered me, until I longed for the magic wand to convert me into a bird.

The dreamy, soft sunlight of afternoon and the pale, liquid moonlight in Italy—it is all music. Young lovers passed my window cooing in that soft musical Italian,

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From them I caught the inspiration for my operatic *debut.* I studied every glance, every motion, for hours, for art's sake.

I received a number of letters regularly from home, but they seemed to be written almost in a foreign language. I had so steeped my brain in the study of Italian that I could scarcely read my native tongue.

In one of mother's letters during the following spring she wrote: 'I think it is quite time that you made your *debut*, Minza; you are going on in years.'

Growing old! Oh, how a lonely woman dreads it! With her, there is no responsive mother-love, no little arms about her neck to compensate for those grey hairs and wrinkles. Oh mothers, mothers! you may be worn out with the cries and boisterous romp of those little ones, but in them you have the only true happiness known to a woman. A pure mother-love is the nearest approach to heavenly affection.

Mother's letter decided it; and the next day I told my tutor of my determination.

'Professor, I want to make my *debut* this season.'

He looked at me rather startled.

'No, you are not ready. You must dazzle the world. Your trills need more finish. Your voice is not strong enough to stand the strain and blend with those shrieking, bellowing Germans.'

He disliked the Germans very much.

There was another reason why I was anxious to make that *debut.* I had a rival. She was a sweet girl, had plenty of money and friends, and her voice was really captivating; but I will confess I could not love my rival. She was announced to appear later in the

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season, and I was anxious to come out first and settle my fate before I had to suffer a contrast. My weak point was in acting—I was awkward, and could only take slow and dignified *roles*.

The tenor with whom I rehearsed had a very bad breath and his face was pitted with small-pox, although he made a handsome lover on the stage. His Alfredo in 'La Traviata' was a finished conception, and our voices blended well, though I found it difficult to put any spirit and enthusiasm into our love scene during the rehearsals.

'You must have Signor Tonza,' said my teacher; 'your voices blend like a chime of bells—so beautiful, exquisite!'

The last dress rehearsal had ended. My teacher, Signor Gellani, was to direct the opera. How his *baton* inspired me! I found every retard, and soon cultivated the art of watching the wave of that wand without looking at him. The rehearsal was anything but encouraging; my high notes would shriek shrilly, and a huskiness was apparent in the lower tones that would ruin any *debutante*. The *impresario* wanted to postpone the opera. I said, 'No, my fate must be decided to-night.'

What a tremor I felt in the dressing-room that night! The maid brought my slippers first, and after carefully adjusting the blonde wig announced me as 'made-up.' I would wear no flowers.

'Just a simple rose, signorita!' pleaded the maid.

'No, I must win my laurels first,' I whispered.

Hark! The orchestra began softly the *adagio preludio*. As the *tempo* increased, my heart beat faster

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and faster. The dashing chromatic runs of the *Introduzione* had just commenced when the call-boy appeared. The curtain bell tapped as we reached the wings, and I hastily threw away the lemon I had been enjoying, and took my position as the curtain was raised and the male *coro* began.

A short prayer before my first tone! The wand fell before my eyes. The crisis of a life had come. Was I to succeed? I responded to the signal of the *baton*—dancing like a black demon before my eyes—and sang the opening and touching phrase of Violetta's welcome.

Many times had I sung those notes, but never before had I realized that, although a joyous response of welcome—it was a Minor Chord. Would that Minor follow me through life and influence my whole career?

I cannot remember many incidents of that night. The dear old director was so furiously excited that he nearly lost his place. It was that first phrase which must decide my fate. A Minor strain!

I gathered all my strength for the *duettino* with Alfredo. It must be music. The singing of birds seemed to break upon me, and I half closed my eyes to the blinding sea of light in front, for the supreme moment had come, and the high note was approaching. I took a careful breath and sustained the note easily with a crescendo and diminuendo. My mind flashed on every note in the score. The orchestra was sympathetic, so that I soon forgot the notes themselves—the glides, the rests, the holds; my soul seemed fired with the

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spirit of the dashing, defiant Violetta. In fact, my chief concern was the precise location of my hands and feet rather than the score of the music. It is the last phrase that usually impresses the audience for good or ill. I threw into the song a tone that expresses despairing passion, but which can never be written in notes—a wail of despairing love. With it came a vision of mother and home, and tears burst through my heavily pencilled eyelashes. I held the last two notes fervently, loth to leave them. I was afraid they were falling short of the mark. What mockery there seemed in those last two measures of the opera, 'How joyful!'

It, too, was a Minor refrain.

Even the accelerated dash of the orchestral finale as the curtain fell was a crash—a Minor Chord.

There was a wild outburst of applause when the curtain had fallen upon the finale. Handkerchiefs waved, and the little colony of Americans who were present were fairly frantic; and as I stepped before the curtain I was crowned with a handsome wreath of flowers. I was so dazed by the rush of events that I forgot to bow my acknowledgments until I was reminded by Tonza, who had led me on.

A few moments later there was a knock at my door.

'Come in,' I said wearily.

'Signorita vas e-exquizite!' said Gellani excitedly. 'Ze signorita's a great prima!' he continued, dancing around.

The next day the musical critics scored poor Tonza and me severely, with an occasional modification.

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But I had made my operatic *debut*, and my career now began in earnest.

I sat down and wrote to mother, enclosing translations of the most favorable portions of the criticisms. I also wrote to dear Howard Wittaker, my newspaper friend at Boston, and also to my enthusiastic benefactor, Mr. Bluffingame. But before that letter reached Howard, he had had syndicate letters and correspondence wired all over the United States: 'Great Conquest in Italy of the Young and Beautiful American Prima Donna, Madame Helvina!'

Here is where the deception of my stage biography began. He knew little of my real history, and, like the usual American newspaper man, arranged a romantic career for me. Howard was warm-hearted and impulsive, and I never had the heart to contradict his fairy stories.

'I have taken the flood-tide to work up a great reception for you when you return,' he wrote, 'and you will be received in a chariot of honors.'

He kept aglow a curiosity concerning my personality, which always increases public interest, and gave my career enough mystery to whet the public appetite. Even mother did not recognize her own daughter in the newspaper articles, and to-day very few of the old Smithville friends know that 'Madame Helvina' is Minza Maxwell.

I thought much of home during these days, and one night I dreamt that I was back with Tim at the old limekiln. It was moonlight, and I was on the island in the center of the millpond. Tim was standing on the shore, crying: 'Come, Minza, come!' But there

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was a gulf between us. Mirrored in the placid waters was the face of Angela. Angela ! O Angela ! sister of my childhood !

I awoke, and found my face wet with tears. Even my budding fame could not bring back the lost love of youth.

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CHAPTER XXIII.

We always cling to whatever we first succeed in. The author who makes a hit with a certain idea seems to have that idea for ever after hovering about him, and the same cast of character remains with him throughout life.

We may theorize upon the essentials and ingredients of success, immortalize hard work, genius, and careful study; but thousands sink into obloquy, into unknown graves, whose efforts are perhaps more admirable and perfect, from a theoretical standpoint, than those who flash the flint and fire of fame.

My success was in many ways a chance; it struck a popular vein, and my ability was equal to the emergency that presented itself.

The vigorous attacks of the critics said that I was awkward in my acting, and had evidently never known the joys of a real lover and the art of love-making. To strengthen this weakness I decided to go to Paris and study with Delsarte, and take boxing lessons if necessary, in order to be able gracefully to embrace a lover.

Dear, gay Paris!

The course of lessons which I took in posing and in plastiques was arduous. It seemed as if I had my

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every natural motion to reform. My fingers must not spread out; my arms must wave in curves—no sharp corners in Art, no rectangular motions—all in graceful arcs, as the sky above. I must confess I grew to enjoy it, and the staid old butler, who accompanied me on my walks lost his hat several times when I took a sudden and erratic fancy to box.

This was Delsarte, you know.

What a flood of historical recollections came upon me as I walked through the streets of Paris! The pavements were covered with tables and chairs, and everyone seemed to be drinking yellow absinthe and reflecting. The Parisians ought to be sober-minded people, considering the amount of meditating they do. The Théâtre National, with its imperious bronze figures, fascinated me. Should I ever sing in that temple of opera? At Père-la-Chaise I came upon the tomb of Héloïse and Abelard. Under a canopy of stones from the monastery of Abelard were the two recumbent figures—monk and nun. They were buried side by side, the emblem of disappointed love. The story is old; and as I stood looking over the iron fence at the beautiful flowers, young French girls with pensive eyes passed by and flung withered bouquets upon the dingy old tomb.

I thought of Tim.

It was nearly dark when I left behind me the shadows of the cemetery. As I passed through the gates, the chimes echoed once more a Minor Chord.

But, as soon as I was safe in my snug and cosy room with my music, the dismal feelings were dispelled.

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Late that evening there was a knock at my door. It was a woman clad but poorly, and about to become a mother.

'Madame Helvina,' she said, in pure American accent, 'it is you or the Seine.' This with a tragic gesture, pointing to the river.

'What is the matter?' I said, coming closer to her.

'Two years ago I came to Paris from America, a happy, ambitious girl,' she said. 'I wanted to be an actress. I studied, and made my appearance; but, oh, the temptations, madame! It's the old story, and here I am, ready to die.'

She broke down, crying, and I pitied her. I knew something of the temptations of an actress. Worshipped, flattered and adored, she has temptations that those who so heartlessly condemn her never dream of.

We sat talking far into the night, and she told me her story in detail. She said her name was Lila Lingham, and when she referred to the young lover whom she had left behind in America, and pulled from her breast a picture of her mother, I was soon crying with her.

My means were scant, but she should not be turned out into the street.

Her babe was born a few days afterwards. Lila improved slowly, but her face grew hard and solemn when she nursed the child. Three or four weeks later, on my return from a lesson, I found Lila gone, and the baby crying pitifully in its cradle. I waited anxiously for some weeks for news of her; but nothing could be learned as to where she had gone. I had communicated the matter to the police, and one day

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received a message from the gendarmerie to visit the Morgue at once.

What a chapter of human misery is pictured behind those glass partitions! The row of ghastly faces look out upon you with all the conceivable horrors of death. On the last table in the corner, No. 618, was the face I sought. There lay Lila—beautiful in death; the cruel waters of the Seine seemed to have washed away the deep lines of sorrow on her face.

It was the old story over again; and now my thoughts were for the child. I prepared to be a real mother to him, and gave him the name of Tim; but two weeks after I followed the tiny coffin to the cemetery. The little life had faded like a tender flower, and with it my hopes.

The death of the little nameless infant had occasioned me a great deal of anxiety. I should never have been able to go through it all had it not been for a Mrs. Campbell, an elderly Scotch lady, who was then residing in Paris, occupying the rooms adjoining mine. She always wore a neat white widow's cap, and her kind heart sparkled in her smiles, and even seemed to glisten through the gold-rimmed spectacles.

It was in Paris that I witnessed a balloon ascent with Mrs. Campbell. It brought back the old sad memories of Bob. I confess that I had almost forgotten the husband to whom I was still wedded—a husband in the air! Not a word had I heard from him since that last voyage of his. A young girl was to make the ascent, and it was made a *fete* day in the Bois de Boulogne. The great swaying balloon started on its aërial voyage slowly and majestically. It gave

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me a shudder as it lurched now this way and now that, on, up, up into the clouds!

'Why do they allow such nonsense?' said Mrs. Campbell excitedly. 'I call anyone crazy that would venture on such an expedition. It ought not to be allowed.'

'Yes, but anything is allowed that makes money, auntie,' I replied, for I had begun to call her by that endearing name.

'Well, it's tempting Providence, and a man who would make a balloon has sold himself to the devil!'

Dear auntie! She did not know how every word cut me. She was so kind to a lonesome girl! Was I widow or wife? Had I done my full duty in trying to find poor Bob? We often meet people who become a conscience to us, and Mrs. Campbell was mine. Should I tell her my story? That night I fell asleep at her side—for she now shared my rooms—dreaming of Bob and his balloons.

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CHAPTER XXIV.

WHEN success is once under full headway, it is accumulative. The world worships success. While in Paris I received the offer of an engagement at Covent Garden in London. I had long looked forward to it, and now my dear grandfather should go to the opera, although he held to the old ideas that an actress was in the lower levels of society. He had served many years as butler in a very aristocratic family, and had assimilated all the notions of the gentry. His faithful life of service had developed an ideal character, and I consoled myself for the lack of a pedigree by thinking that the best people must come from servants, as they transmit virtues, while their masters inherit and re-inherit the vices of luxury; so that every few generations the servant becomes master, and the master servant. I was bound to cling to the belief that somehow I had good blood in my veins.

On the first night of my engagement at Covent Garden there were members of the Royal Family present, and, while I affected not to consider it a special event, I must confess it put me into quite a flutter. The opera to be given was 'Lohengrin.' Elsa was my favorite *role*, and how happy I was to see dear grandfather's bright, beaming face in one of those red plush-

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lined boxes! His big blue eyes were wide awake like a child's with wonderment, and he reminded me of father. In the box with him was Mrs. Campbell. His courtly gallantry was quite true to the ideals of the old school, and Mrs. Campbell's face beamed brighter than ever.

The violins began with the plaintive high notes of the opening measures, the chords began to gather for a crash and climax as only Wagner's master-hand could make them.

I prayed to God as the soft, sad notes which preceded my entrance were given by the orchestra.

Attired in pure marguerite white, I stepped down to the front of the stage with measured steps. Every note I studied before reaching it. 'Music, my heart! music!' was my cry.

I watched for the response. It was to grandpa that I was singing. I caught his eyes sparkling with tears, and it gave me a thrill of delight. Every pantomimic action of the opera now seemed easy. The tenor was rather stiff at first, but I soon had him devoted to me. Our bridal chamber duet was the best we had ever rendered. The spirit of the composer came upon us. The curly wig and jaunty cap of Lohengrin was my ideal of Tim, and I threw myself into a trance of childhood once more. The quiet dazed look—the innocent Elsa expression which I had rehearsed for hours before a glass—it was all so natural to me now. No matter how many times I may sing a *role*, there is always some particular part that I dread, and once it is passed I feel a sense of relief.

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The duet was my dread that night; but it proved to be the greatest success of the evening.

Grandpa was satisfied, and I was happy, although the critics were rather harsh next day.

'Minza, little Minza! Rob' s girl!—and such a singer!' I never dreamed of living for so much happiness,' said grandpa, as he kissed me after the opera, as father alway did. 'So like your dear grandma! How I wish she were here! Poor mother!' and he brushed way a tear.

* * *

Grandma was dead, and buried in the pretty little churchyard at Ashley. Aunt Manda was the only daughter living, and she had been in service all her life with an earl. She had almost been a mother to the family, including the viscount and four daughters. They all seemed to love her, and were much attached to her.

'My young ladies' dogs,' said Aunt Manda, one day when I met her in Hyde Park by appointment. There were ten of them—all sorts and colors—out for an airing. 'I have just been to the doctor for little Pete.'

'Doctors for dogs, auntie!

'Oh, yes; they have all the luxuries of life.'

These four young ladies and their dogs, how I pitied them! Clever, beautiful, and yet vacant young lives, simply existing, waiting for the matrimonial market to be more active, and concentrating their inert affection on dogs.

I went to visit Aunt Manda one day at the earl's

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London house. I entered by the servants' door at the rear. We took tea with the housekeeper and upper servants, the butler, the valet, and powdered footman, and gossiped; they knew more about the doings and 'goings on' of English aristocracy than the lords and ladies themselves. Every carriage and coachman was known to them. Family secrets were peddled out by the yard. We had scarcely finished tea when there was a commotion outside in the hall.

'Maxwell, Maxwell, why do you leave poor Pete alone?' It was my lady calling poor auntie because she had left the dog, which did not look worth a decent burial, and in the hum of conversation at the table she had not heard the bell ring.

'The doctor's here, and you must mind his instructions,' continued my lady.

The doctor felt doggy Pete's pulse and winked at the butler.

In the beautiful boudoir upstairs no fewer than ten little dogs revelled in luxurious ease with the four young ladies taking tea. They kissed the dogs, and drank some tea; then drank their tea, and kissed the dogs. It was an ideal scene of an English lady's passion for dogs. True, they are faithful friends who never tell secrets and are always grateful. Another kiss and hug for doggy. Under those very windows were a score of little children—London street waifs—crying and starving for bread. Even a hungry dog will be given a crust when it is denied to human beings.

'Maxwell, you must not loiter here. Come along; bustle about, attend to the dogs, and feed them prop-

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erly.' It was one of the daughters, who spoke in a rather languid and irritable tone. My fist doubled instinctively. My auntie a slave—a keeper of dogs—for these vacant, idle, and shiftless beings who happened to be born under an earl's roof!

I caught a glimpse of the viscount as he passed by the door. He was a handsome young fellow, but his sister's words burned into my heart. He was a member of Parliament—Lord Hamper, eldest son of the Earl of Elferton.

I took a cab home, and arranged that auntie should take tea with me on the following Wednesday.

That night, after the opera, a card was presented. 'Lord Hamper.' We met. My eyes drooped—perhaps I put an extra dimple in my cheeks—I tried to be winsome. He was very clever, and sympathized with some of my pet philanthropic ideas. He called the next night, and the next. It was becoming truly interesting, and the chorus girls all gossiped as to how cleverly Madame Helvina had caught the son of an English earl. Lord Hamper was a musician, and I confess it was rather nice to receive his handsome presents and adoration.

'May I see you to-morrow?' he said on Tuesday night. 'I have something important to say to you.'

I dropped my eyes quickly and blushed.

'Perhaps,' I murmured.

'But I must. I have come to—'

'Isn't that a beautiful likeness of Tonza?' I broke in, anxious to change the subject, and pointing to a photograph.

'May I come to-morrow?' he persisted.

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'Tea at four,' I said, rising.

'You make me so happy!' he said, as he bowed himself out.

The next day he appeared promptly at four o'clock.

I always liked to make the tea myself, and he watched me with interest—even helping me; the scene was altogether charmingly domestic.

I was about to pass him a cup of tea.

'Before I drink a drop I must know my fate. I—I—adore you, Madame Helvina! Will you—will you ——' In his ardor in kneeling he had knocked the cup from my hand, and it contents poured down his shirt-front, and almost made me laugh outright. But he was in earnest.

'You must marry me,' he continued, getting up, trying to wipe away the yellow stain, and picking up the empty cup.

'Well, I'll see,' I replied cooly. 'Why, I expected more company to tea,' I said, endeavoring to set matters right.

'Why didn't you tell me? I shall go; but let me say I love you, and will make you happy as my wife. Say the word, my queen! My queen——'

He was on his knees again, in order to prolong our *tete-a-tete*, and determined to have his say.

At that moment Aunt Manda bustled in, with her delegation of ten dogs, from a walk in the Park.

She was startled: he was confounded.

'My Aunt Manda, Lord Hamper,' I said, introducing her.

'Why, she is my sister's maid!' he exclaimed.

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'Is that so?' I said innocently. 'She is my own flesh and blood, my father's sister.'

'The devil!' he gasped, as he started to take his leave, with scarcely a glance at Aunt Manda.

The rumor was circulated that I had refused the hand of an earl's son. But I hadn't.

There is a tinge of class distinction left in England. Aunt Manda was amazed, and tried to disown me, so that Lord Hamper should not be so miserable; but she could not change my birthright. I was Minza Maxwell, decended from a Cornish pirate and English servants; but, above all, an American, and proud of it.

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CHAPTER XXV.

AFTER I had enjoyed a few days' rest at Ashley, Howard Wittaker, the Boston newspaper man, made his appearance. He gave me quite a surprise, and announced that he had come to act as my business manager.

Now that the *debut* was really over, and the critics had opened their heavy artillery upon me, the doors of the large theatres in Europe swung open, and the wrestle with managers began.

From London I went to Berlin, the engagement there being entirely devoid of any special incidents. The handsome German army officers with their *pince-nez* were quite gallant, and attracted my admiration. My Elsa was severely criticised—I cried over the bitter words—but it aroused the old spirit. The Germans should yet praise me in my favorite Wagnerian *role*.

Everything in Berlin was strange: the Thier Garten, with its delightful and romantic drives; and the boats on the Spree which are pushed along by means of long poles. Yes, there was worse drudgery than a prima donna's career! The dingy old palace, the flashing statue of Victory,

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dear old Linden Street—all these were charming. The Germans live in their beer-gardens, and truly cultivate the social spirit. I stole a few hours to visit the National Gallery, with its rooms radiating from a centre like the spokes of a wheel. The pictures thrilled me, and I quite fell in love with Art; but my life's mission was Music, and I had to tear myself away for rehearsals.

A week later I was at Dresden. As incidental to a prima donna's career, I thought a visit to the Green Vaults, with their priceless jewels, was quite proper.

What is the worth of jewels, after all? We struggle to own them, and yet the humblest tourist can enjoy these matchless gems quite as much as the royalties who once owned and used as every-day trifles those great swords studded with diamonds and rubies! The radiance and reflection of sapphire, amethyst, emerald, opal, the sheen of pearls, quite bewildered me with their blaze. Like all women, I was fascinated with beautiful jewels, and was a wee bit envious.

Another weakness I discovered while in Dresden was china. I enjoyed selecting presents for those at home, and I think, if Howard had not given me a very strong hint, I should have been another thousand dollars in debt if I had remained longer within reach of temptation.

The second night of our engagement there, Tonza fell ill, and an understudy was brought from Berlin to take his part. We were called hastily for an extra rehearsal that afternoon. In the dim light of the Opera House, with my mind quite under the spell of the china shops, I did not notice who was to sing

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Lohengrin. It was a new voice, and yet—surely I had heard it before. I came up from the dressing-room hurriedly.

It was Gene Paroski!

How my heart thrilled! In two years the fair-haired boy had developed into full and robust manhood. It brought back the memory of my first meeting with him.

'Madame Helvina!' he whispered hurriedly, as the orchestra began, and we were about to sing.

The rest was told in the songs.

He made music of every note—not that tiresome, quavering vibrato, that seems uncertain and wavers about a semitone; not that expletive angry gush that tenors love to gurgle when in the last stages of despairing love; not that clever falsetto and head tone—but a voice robust, firm, clear, manly, and musical.

They say prima donnas and tenors must fall in love to sing well. Musically, perhaps they do, for I felt an affinity in singing with Gene Paroski that I had never felt before.

That performance decided that I was to go to Bayreuth. At last my Elsa was appreciated, and I had found what I wanted—a sympathetic Lohengrin.

During the opera we had scarcely spoken a word together, but the music and looks expressed it all. His eyes glistened with fervor, but be were both unconscious of those in front. We were Elsa and Lohengrin.

After the curtain on the last act he kissed my hand.

'To you, madame, I owe everything,' he said.

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'Hush! you are talking nonsense,' I replied.

'We will live for music, madame, real music. And you will yet be the unrivaled queen of opera,' he continued warmly.

'Don't flatter, Gene,' I said. 'There is a long road with many turnings in a public career. But I'm so proud of you!'

'Are you? Well, you're responsible. I can never forget those kind words of encouragement you gave me on the steamer.'

He told me his story, giving me a picture of his mother and himself, and we got on famously in our friendship; and, happily, he did not mar it by persistent love-making every time we were alone.

The ways of managers are past understanding. Although critics praised our joint efforts, the understudy was kept in the ranks, and I continued with Tonza. The managers would not agree to my suggestion of an engagement for Gene in 'Lohengrin.'

'You will be getting married, and that will spoil it all,' was the heartless conclusion.

They did not know that Madame Helvina already had a husband in the air!

The more stubborn they were, the more friendly we became, and managed to sing together many times —alone.

We worshipped at Apollo's shrine.

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CHAPTER XXVI.

GOING home! going home! I believe I must have jumped about like a little girl when Howard announced it one day in Berlin. Howard was developing into an ideal and practical manager.

I had just returned from an excursion to Sans Souci gardens at Potsdam, where I had revelled among the fountains and grounds made famous by Frederick the Great. The terrace which the great monarch used to pace for his morning walk was now overgrown with flowers. The little low palace of one story, Voltaire's room, the Death Gate—all this regal magnificence, and yet the owner died unhappy. The scenes of the day impressed me, and I looked forward now with pleasure to reading Carlyle's 'Frederick the Great;' but Howard's good news dissipated my intention.

'But going home! going home! How sweet it seemed to an American who had been exiled for so long! There is no lustre in fame that can dim the radiance of home love.

When the great vessel steamed into New York Harbor my eyes filled with tears. O America! How I loved my native land! It makes us better patriots to travel. During the years I had been absent I had wit-

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nessed no grander scene than the old Stars and Stripes floating everywhere in the great city; for it was Memorial Day—a day set apart to decorate the graves of soldiers by the children, as they sing patriotic songs and do honors to the heroes, living and dead. My father was a soldier; was his grave strewn with flowers?

I had not heard from home for some time, and my old fears of death in the home circle were upon me.

During a few engagements in the Eastern States I had the honor to thank and repay my noble benefactor, James Bluffingame. My generous patron was an ideal Boston gentleman. As we went to his handsome home in Back Bay my heart overflowed with gratitude.

'And this is my noble benefactor!' I said, advancing to him, and introducing myself and Mrs. Campbell. 'To you I owe my stage career——'

'Do not talk to me of the stage, madame. I hate it!' he said excitedly.

'Why!' I exclaimed in surprise. 'You were always considered the great patron of the stage in Boston.'

'Yes, but that was before—before——' And he broke into tears.

'Well, madame, perhaps I am unreasonable,' he continued; 'but the stage robbed me of my pretty little girl, my only hope in old age. She wanted to become an actress, and went to Europe, like you. I gave her the money, as I did you, but—but——' He broke down again.

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'Was she in Paris?' asked Mrs. Campbell, with a kindly sympathy.

'Yes, and there all trace was lost of her for a time. She wrote that she was married, and then came that last letter, her death-warrant. Poor Lila——'

'Was it in the Morgue?' I broke in quickly.

'Only No. 618,' he said sadly. 'Photographs were sent us, and there was no doubt of the horrible truth. We brought her home, and she now sleeps in Auburn, beside her mother. The stage was her hell, her doom. Do you wonder that I hate it?'

Should we tell him all we knew? The old church bell just then sounded a Minor tone. It seemed like a knell for poor Lila. We did not tell him the sad story—it would have been too cruel.

When we returned, I urged Howard to hurry on to Chicago, and told him I should have to have a fortnight's holiday alone after that.

'Where are you going?' he asked, puzzled.

'Never mind. I don't want to see you for two weeks.'

Was I ashamed of my home and my mother? No, God forbid! But the deception had commenced, and even he must not know that I was a plain Iowa girl.

'All right,' he said good-naturedly. 'If you can trust me with all your money, I can trust you.'

'How much can I have?'

'You've some heavy orders for costumes.'

'I must have one thousand dollars.'

'Oh, that's easy,' he said, giving his elk charm a whirl; 'but the engagement here must be filled first.'

There was over a fortnight yet before I could leave

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the World's Fair grounds, and I telegraphed for mother to come to me from that little Iowa town—my home.

The next day we met in Chicago—mother and I. Oh, how happy I was when we walked together through the grounds—mother and I!

The oratorio first rendered was 'The Creation,' mother's favorite, and how that little face in the centre riveted me! The 'cooing dove' passage caught my whole spirit—I sang to mother.

Planzo Gendar was the baritone, and Signor Tonza the tenor, and it seemed so easy to sing the difficult trio! The choruses were inspiring.

I was proud, as an American, to wander down the Court of Honor, past the Fountain, and across the bridge at the peristyle, and feel that the wonders of the ancients had been outdone. There was a gorgeous harmony, and yet a soft, subtle symmetry in that white city, that never can be surpassed. It seemed like a dream. The Circular Music Hall was difficult to sing in; but to stir again the enthusiasm of an American audience outweighed all other considerations to me.

As was the rage, during the early part of the Fair, mother and I went on a tour through Midway Plaisance. The Ferris wheel had just begun lazily to turn, and the Captive Balloon—what a shudder it gave me!—brought back memories of poor Bob. The streets of Cairo, the Java village, old Vienna, the Dahomeys—it was all a collection of wonders never before gathered in one place. We wheeled each other about in chairs, mother and I, for no carriages were allowed in those great grounds. The Exposition seemed like a continued national circus day. There were surging seas

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of happy faces, and yet I was looking for one face!

When mother was tired out in the evening, I used to wander along the beach of Lake Michigan, as it sang the memories of childhood. I wandered into the Iowa building, with its gay decorations of corn and wheat, and the verandas filled with the happy country people.

I was looking for a face among them. Would it be there?

I dared not express my feelings even to mother. It was a heart secret, and the pictures of childhood's scenes seemed incomplete without that face.

I almost feared that the handsome Columbian Guards were beginning to know me, as I took those lonely walks along the beach every night towards the little grey stone Iowa Building.

I believe I was almost foolish and crazy about it. In the little groups about the Iowa building I occasionally caught a glimpse of a familiar face, but I shrank away for fear of recognition. It was not the face I was looking for. I quite expected to meet him. Yes! even among the glories of Jackson Park, the regal magnificence of American achievement, with a promising career before me, and even mother with me—there was one thing lacking—one face missing.

Is it so with all of us? We can answer only to our heart's heart.

I was glad when the last day of my engagement arrived. Mother now timorously ventured to come with me to the dressing-room.

'Why, Minza, you don't always have to whitewash that way, do you?'

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It was the hare's paw and make-up box that startled her.

'Yes, mother. My real self is dead; I am a public statue now. Do not ever let the secret be known that Madame Helvina is your daughter. Let me always remain Minza—only Minza—to you.'

The orchestra began, and I walked out to take my seat. In oratorios we can always study the faces before us more than in opera. That day I felt the opera-glasses levelled at me with heartless scrutiny. When I began my first solo my eyes caught a face in the gallery.

The sight so startled me that I nearly broke down; my voice quivered; the orchestral tones seemed a din of confusion; my voice sounded distant and far away. I did not dare look again for those eyes. Could I be mistaken? No, they were there still, and I felt I could keep up no longer. A moment, and I sang to him with my heart aching, and felt those eyes upon me—it was Fred Burroughes. Did he recognize Minza?

But it was not the face I looked for.

Mother was startled when I came out.

'Why, Minza, child, what's the matter? Are you ill?'

'No, mother; I saw Fred Burroughes in the audience, and it quite upset me.'

'Did he recognize you?'

'I don't know,' I replied sadly.

'I hope not, Minza. Fred's gone to the bad. He ran away from his wife and married an actress—now they are "vaudeville" people, and he has served a

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year in prison for bigamy. They are not considered respectable in Smithville.'

'But, mother, remember what he did for us!'

'Yes, my child, but we cannot help him now. It would ruin you were it known that——'

'Mother, I will see him and thank him to-morrow,' I said firmly.

But it was too late. The flashing headlines in the newspapers the next morning told of the tragic suicide of Fred Burroughes, the variety actor. Poor Fred! I never expressed the appreciation I felt. But perhaps that is the way of the world. The pendulum swung me up, he went down; and if no one else mourned his death, Minza, the friend of childhood, wept tears of sorrow.

An 'unknown friend' secured for him a resting-place in Oakland, and a few months later saw the little violets from the old home in Iowa blooming over his grave.

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CHAPTER XXVII.

FRED'S death delayed our trip to Iowa a few days. Every passing tree, I fancied, nodded a greeting as we sped away over the rolling prairies. How dear the large green fields of the old Hawkeye State seemed! How rich and fertile and smiling the landscape appeared that bright June morning!

'Won't it be a surprise for them?' thought I, as we stepped from the train at dusk at Smithville, and started to walk home.

I rushed along the village street ahead of mother, for fear some of the old neighbors might recognize me.

Where was the dear old house? I did not see it nestling among the trees. A larger, new-fashioned house stood in its stead. Why had they not written to me, and why had they torn down that little cottage I loved so well?

A tall young man was busy with a lawn-mower in the front garden.

'Does Mr. Robert Maxwell live here?' I inquired.

'Well, rather. And this is my sister Minza, I'll bet. I'm Jim.'

The way I hugged that young rascal was a caution.

'Where's father—and Tod?' I said all in one breath.

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'Father's over at Rathbone's. She's very ill.'

'Who? Tim? Children—Angela!' I exclaimed.

'Yes, she's had trouble enough to die,' said Jim. 'But come in. My! but, Minza, you wear fine dresses now,' he continued, with admiring brotherly glances.

It seemed impossible to realize that this was the little baby I had nursed. I could not take my arms from his neck.

'I must see father!' I exclaimed, jumping up hurriedly, as Jim, lazily, as a boy that age always acts, grunted out:

'I'll go and get him. You sit still, or don't you want to——' He stopped and looked at me.

'Yes, I'll go,' and without taking off my cloak I started across the road under the towering row of maples, and passed the sand-pile where Angela and I used to play together.

Father saw me and rushed out.

'Minza, my daughter!' and the little grey-haired man embraced me tenderly. 'She's very low,' he whispered as we went in.

The room was dark; the light of a flickering lamp only was on her pale face; her cheeks were sunken, her lips parched. It was Angela! What must she have suffered? I took the thin hand and kissed it affectionately.

'Who's this?—Mrs. Brady?' she whispered in a faint voice. 'No, no, its—it's—Minza.'

With a cry, she feebly placed her arms about my neck.

Angela, Angela, sister of my childhood! About

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the room was three little children, all Tim's, the alternate image of father and mother.

'You've come—come! O Minza! forgive——' continued Angela.

'Hush,' I said, kissing the dry lips. 'Now rest quietly.'

What a flood-tide of memories came back as I watched at that bedside! Would Tim come?

As I bent over the suffering woman I could see but little trace of that happy girlish face I had left behind me.

I held her in my arms and she slept. It was not long before I heard a noise at the door, and the children began to scamper to the kitchen.

'It's papa, it's papa!' they whispered in concert like frightened birds.

I was to meet him at last—the face I had so long sought in vain! My heart stood still.

'Gi' o't my way, there! she's allus sick—hic—I'm a lord mayor, I am.'

Tim was drunk!

This told the story of that pallid face and those frightened children. I laid her down gently.

'Don't go—go—Min—za—he's only—ah, my——'

I walked out into the other room. With a light in my hand I faced the drunken man.

Was *that* the face? 'Tim!' I said, as he staggered towards me.

'Mush 'bliged, mum, eh! Neighbors always in the way.'

'Tim!' I said a second time, 'it's Minza.'

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That seemed to sober him. What a wreck he was, though his blood-shot eyes flashed the old fire!

'Minza, Minza!' And he sat down and cried.

I shook his limp hand as he sat with bowed and shamed head. After kissing the sleeping face, as the other neighbors came to take the watch at the sick bed, I returned home.

This saddened my home-coming.

I found Tod at home, proud as a king in his new scarlet band uniform.

'Minza, Minza, my famous sister!' he cried as he hung to me.

How swiftly those few days at home passed! and yet I was not sorry when they were over! Everything was so changed!—there were no familiar faces to greet me.

The day before I was to leave I went to see Angela. She was much better and sitting up, although very weak.

'Yes, I shall get well now,' she said faintly, but there was something strained in her expression. I had not seen Tim since that first meeting.

That afternoon we were aroused by the cries of children from across the street.

'Mother's dying, mother's dying!' and when we arrived we found those three little girls clinging to the bedclothes and being kissed 'Good-bye' by the dying mother.

Tim stood weeping at the opposite side of the bed.

'I have killed her, Minza! Oh, if I could die too!' he cried in despair.

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One last glance as her eyes looked into mine, and she smiled in recognition.

That was the last on earth. Angela, sweet sister Angela was dead.

I remained to attend the funeral. The songs we used to sing together at Sunday School were to be sung at Angela's funeral.

The next morning Tim and I stood face to face over the coffin.

'Minza, I am a wreck, and I wrecked her life too,' he said, pointing to the dead face, now calm and peaceful. 'Minza, in God's presence I must confess it all.'

I could stand it no longer, and over that coffin we wept together.

She was buried at the old limekiln. What a funeral it was! My voice broke in those simple songs of childhood. My heart was too full. As we stood at the graveside the rustle of the leaves of the old walnut tree came as a whisper from the dead. 'Dust to dust!' Underneath the very spot we used to sit as children, Angela was buried—the place where I had first plighted my troth to Tim!

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CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE American tour was soon finished. It was one of those lulls in life which leave a blank behind in memory. It was simply a dull routine—in and out of those handsome hotels, of which only the United States can boast. What luxury is spread before the traveler! What exquisite decorations in dark corners and corridors, never seen or appreciated!

Another year, and I was to make the great test of my powers in Wagner's opera at Bayreuth. I continued my study of the German language, the verbs and genders still puzzling me. There seemed nothing musical in the guttural tones of the German tongue. Of course I had many callers and made many new acquaintances but I was too much absorbed in my work to appreciate it all. There are times when our energies wax and wane, and in one of the consequent lulls I met the Hon. David J. Hendershot, a young member of Congress. He was a keen, typical American, always entertaining and interesting. He told me at various times the story of his life, and I found his early struggles were something similar to my own.

'We have to seize opportunity by the forelock and play upon human nature as upon a harp,' he mused one

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day. 'Do you know, we have a reflection of European aristocracy in America?'

'No,' I replied warmly. 'Our only aristocracy in America is Merit. A man must win distinction in letters, politics, music, art, journalism, or even make money, before he is recognized as distinguished. Merit is our only royalty.'

'You did not include the distinguished notoriety acquired by any fool of a crank. No,' he continued, 'you only know America generalize l; I know it particularized. My first political success was due to the fact that I was the member of numerous lodges and civic societies.'

'And have you ridden those horrid society goats?' I broke in.

'Yes; you know it is a rage with us. We have hundreds of different secret societies whose mission may be social or benevolent; and the tinsel and display of the Sir Knights of the Beanpole in lodge rooms and on public occasions indicate that humanity even in America has a love for the flash of royal robes and diadems. Nowadays there is not an American who does not belong to from one to a dozen of these societies and lodges. We all wear buttons in our coat lapels, and emblems of our degree. Even a hod-carrier may be a Sir Knight or a High Royal Bumper in some secret organization. It is a great age of societies with us, and we all have some hobby which holds our interest and in which we usually hold office.'

'Now, you are not telling lodge secrets?' I asked.

'Oh, no, I am only taking a general view. Even our labor organizations invest their leaders with jewels

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and arbitrary power, perhaps modified by the action of a committee. I confess I am beginning to believe it would be best to take to the monarchical form of government and be done with it.'

'And you a member of Congress! For shame!' I said.

'Yes, but we must face facts and not theories. The absorption in making money and the tremendous prosperity of the working classes for some years past has bred discontent, which is fanned by the agitators. The men all want to be masters; the strife is not so much a question of wages as it is an outburst against caste mingled with envy and jealousy on both sides. In politics we are taught to always plead for the workingman in legislation. Well enough! We must look to their interests; but have they not just as much human greed as——'

'Yes, but the poor man is made to feel the sting of poverty by the wealthy, who flaunt their diamonds in his face, thinking that everything is purchasable——'

'It is,' he broke in. 'Why do you struggle? For money! Why do the streets throng with people selling matches, fruit, shoe-strings? Why does the merchant fill his windows with rich displays of his wares? Why do the railroads spend millions for franchises and special legislation—trusts absorb all competition? To make money.'

'You are too severe. Don't you know there are human motives aside from these? I never thought of salaries when I studied art. Music was my ambition.'

'You looked forward to a condition brought about

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as a result of the money earned—when you could—you could—marry.'

'Perhaps,' I replied reflectively.

'Yes, money was the medium to accomplish all this. Gold has been the god of humanity since the days of the children of Israel, when they worshipped the golden calf. We worship it for what it affords.'

'Yes; but it brings little happiness,' I said.

'That's the philosophic way of putting it; but we all want it, just the same.'

'You seem to forget that there is such a thing as pure, self-sacrificing love in the gamut of human affection.'

'Oh no,' he continued, laughing. 'It breaks out occassionally, but there is always a motive at the back of it—nearly always.'

'You are soured, I am afraid, and I think you do not realize that every human heart has its good impulses. If distress occurs in one part of our country, how quickly the people respond to relieve the sufferings! If all human misery were actually realized by those able to relieve it, there would be little want. It is because we are in ignorance and do not comprehend ——'

'And that ignorance is studied,' he broke in. 'People put cotton in their ears. Philanthropy is a profession. It becomes a rivalry of some sort or another. Of course we must applaud it; but to me there is more philanthropy in a kind word, sincere sympathy, than in a gorgeous display of patronizing gifts.'

'How about your secret societies?' I asked.

'There we have philanthropy developed in the

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highest degree,' he said warmly. 'We look to our brothers as brothers, and assist them under an oath-bound secrecy.'

It was no use my trying to convert him, but his eyes emphasized every word with a sincerity that was captivating.

We had many talks together, and, although his ideas sometimes vexed me, he was always interesting. In fact, he 'happened' in several different cities where I had engagements.

During my last week in New York he wrote me a letter stating that his re-election was now hanging in the balance, and that he was in the midst of a heated campaign. The following day he came in quite unexpectedly.

'Madame Helvina, I am defeated—I am a bankrupt politician!' he exclaimed.

'Why, the election does not occur till next week,' I replied.

'Yes, but I leave this afternoon for the final hopeless struggle. My opponent is a wealthy man. True, he has no education, nor experience in legislative matters, but he has money. I find his handiwork everywhere; even those working-men for whom I feel so much, have deserted me. His funds have been well distributed among them. He is a successful business man, and his money floats his name everywhere.'

'Perhaps you are prejudiced?' I suggested.

'No,' he insisted. 'It is not the man, but the money, that will defeat me. His ignorance is boasted of as being one reason why he is in sympathy with the

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working-man. He has founded libraries and schools and spent thousands in philanthropy to win this election. He is linked with rich people, who have legislative interests to be looked after.'

'Well, you can live without going to Congress,' I said sympathizingly.

'Yes; but if I had been re-elected I was going to ask you to—to—to marry me.'

The audacity of the proposal rather startled me.

'I am afraid there may be a "motive" at the back of this,' I replied, using his favorite words.

'Don't taunt me,' he cried pleadingly. 'Philosophy is one thing, love is another.'

'You think I must marry political success, then?'

'Yes; all women like success—and successful men.'

'You don't know a woman's heart,' I replied seriously.

'No, that's what I'm trying to find out,' he replied.

Just then Mrs. Campbell entered and our *tete-a-tete* was over. He left soon after, with only ten minutes in which to catch his train.

In less than an hour Howard came into the room.

'Next week we sail for Europe,' he said.

'Yes,' I replied meekly.

'You've had many proposals to marry. Is Hendershot on the list?' he asked ironically.

'Perhaps.'

'Now, Helvy,' he continued, using his favorite title, 'there's no use in my holding back any longer. Have I served you well?'

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'Howard, I can never repay you; but you're not going to leave me?'

'No, Helvy; I never want to leave you. That is the trouble. I want you to let me love you; I want you to be my wife.'

I turned away and broke into tears. Two proposals in an hour!

'Howard, I can never marry.'

'Do you love——'

'I cannot marry; I am wedded—wedded to my art.'

'Yes, but there is another reason,' he continued.

How could I tell him the truth? My poor Bob—a husband in the air—or where?

'No,' I said pleadingly. 'Don't, Howard—don't make me more miserable than I am.'

'Then I ought to leave you, Helvy. I have worked and loved you, trembling lest you might forget your wedded art and marry another. Promise me, Helvy, you will not marry unless for love.'

'I do promise, Howard. But you will not leave me?'

'Well, if we can't be married, my life is yours. I'll be your father, or guardian, or——' he said.

'Be my big brother,' I said earnestly.

And there was no gushing foolishness about Howard.

The week after, we sailed for Europe to take a short holiday in Switzerland before commencing our work.

The parting scene on the pier did not impress me

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as on my first voyage; it had lost its novelty, and there is never the same keen observation the second time.

As we passed the swinging bell-buoy at Sandy Hook it still echoed the Minor Chord.

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CHAPTER XXIX.

ONE of the most fortunate things of my life was the going to Switzerland when I did. It was merely chance; but on the heights of the Righi, at sunrise, as I was awakened by the long-sustained notes of the Alpine horn, it was revealed to me where Richard Wagner had received his inspiration for the opening scenes of 'Parsifal.' The first act of the opera brings to mind that awe-inspiring vision of dawn on the Alps.

Clad in his leathern cap and fantastic red blouse, the herdsman gave his thrilling refrain.

Again it sounded. Then he gave a screech in falsetto, followed by the Alpine song, which echoed down the valley.

The first glance through the window seemed like a dream of heaven. The soft, delicate purple haze bathed the landscape very tenderly; Nature's great night veil was about to be lifted. The moon shone clearly in the zenith, as if loth to leave the clear steel-blue sky. The snow-capped peaks in the distance were so mingled with clouds that it was difficult to distinguish the celestial from the terrestrial; but the snow had a greyer tinge, and even its purity faded beside the spotless white of the clouds.

We gathered on the topmost peak with half-opened

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eyes. Scarcely a word was spoken; all were drinking in the grandeur of the scene. Beneath, the great mountains were sleeping under a coverlet of fleecy, floating clouds. In the valleys, a sea of mist hid the blue waters of Lowerz and Zug from view. On the distant crags, overhanging a precipice, the little Swiss chalets seemed to be sleeping like birds on the branch. Old Sol's first glow appeared between two jagged peaks: first a soft mellow pink; then spears of crimson shot out, as if sentinels to announce his coming. Slowly and majestically the deep red sphere rose from behind the twin peaks to awaken distant Pilatus from slumber. Black, horizontal bars of cloud shot across his face, giving him a fiery red-purple glow of anger as he pushed through the dark obstruction in his path. One could almost see the earth revolve while the heavens stood still. The great orb changed color till its dazzling disc glistened with intensely white purity. Another bank of gloomy clouds above, and the great monster seemed to shake himself as if to bore his way through; when they met, the fiery purple tinge of anger again was seen like sparks from Jove's flint. The clouds and mists scattered before his piercing rays, and like a blazing chariot he continued his way through the heavens.

The shadows of the mountains clung to the dark purple peaks on the other side. They were soon dissolved by the glow of soft virgin light that seemed to playfully chase them down the valley and give each peak its morning bath of golden sunshine.

How close we seemed to Divinity and to God!

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Here was where Wagner caught his inspiration, and here the Finite and Infinite seemed to touch.

Describe it? No, we can only feel it. Art does not exaggerate; no colors on canvas can approach its regal splendor. How that sunrise lives in my memory! It was an inspiration I can never forget.

The next day, in Lucerne, at breakfast, I read the following paragraph in a London paper:—

'STARTLING DISCOVERY.—What seems to be the remains of a balloon and two men were found recently on the south side of the Wetterhorn by Alpine climbers. It is supposed to be the remains of a scientific expedition made some six years ago in an effort to climb the Alps with a balloon, which has never been heard from since.'

Could this be Bob? I started at once to find out the real truth. What suspense it was, as I pictured poor Bob's dead face! His lonely fate haunted me.

I arrived at Grindelwald, and made known my mission. At first I was regarded with suspicion. The remains had been brought down to this romantic little village, and were kept in the back room of a carpenter's shop till the inquest should be held. How I trembled as I entered! Was I alone with my dead? Only two skeletons, and the ragged remains of a silk balloon! No rings or jewelry had been found. I tried in vain to find the least clue, and yet I felt that one of those skeletons was that of my husband. While I sat there as a mourner over the crumbling remains, two Germans came in.

'That's the balloon,' said one, as they examined it closely.

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Among the effects found was a watch which I had not noticed, and the other German picked it up and looked at it minutely.

'Yes, this is his watch,' he continued; 'there is no doubt now.'

I looked up in surprise. Did they know Bob?

'Who are they?' I asked breathlessly.

'Jean Valing and Jacob Stransen, madame. They left us six years ago, and there is no doubt now as to their identity.'

'Was not one of them an American?' I asked anxiously.

'No, both Germans.'

'But might not one of them have been an American?' I persisted.

'No, they were both known to me from childhood. I remember well when they started on this fatal journey to make scientific observations on the Wetterhorn.'

They seemed to be quite satisfied that they had established the identity of their friends, and took charge of the remains. It was not Bob. Had not that balloon returned to earth?

Had I only a phantom husband?

Oh, what a dream I had that night! Bob appeared to me with his aërial car clad in a pure white robe and took me away, up—up—we went. The heights of Righi and Pilatus faded away; the earth seemed like a rolling ship, fighting among cloudy waves in a sea of space. We sailed on and on, and I begged him to return to earth. He shook his head and pointed to the great blinding sun, and said with that old boyish,

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reliant look : 'Hark! Minza, our wedding chimes are sounding.'

He took me in his arms and kissed me—a husband's kiss—I awoke.

The chimes still echoed in my ears. From earth came that Minor Chord mingling with the enraptured symphonies of Heaven.

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CHAPTER XXX.

THE next month found us at Bayreuth, hard at work with rehearsals. The sleepy old Bavarian village has little claim to distinction except for its associations with the great composer. The little old grey houses and narrow streets ; the old Opera House, with its weather-worn statues, and the Town Hall and Cathedral, the canal with its bridges—all these things group themselves together in our memory. What a thrill it gave me when I first passed the house of Wagner ! The white bust of King Ludwig II., his patron, occupies the position of honor in front of the house. The garden behind, with its gravel walks, seemed charming. In these grounds Wagner walked, or sat and wrote. The square brick house and the house at one side are plain and unpretentious. At the back of them is Wagner's grave.

I did not visit it that day. Every night—even before and after the opera—the city resounded with voices rehearsing Wagner's score. It is not like singing the simple song, melody, and ballad, where the first sixteen measures represent the theme varied with a minor strain, so that you can follow it with impromtu accompaniments. Wagner requires an accompanist who must be quite as much of an artist as the singer.

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The spirit of Wagner pervades everything at Bayreuth. His portrait and bust are to be found in every home. The children are taught his music as soon as they lisp. His son is regarded with all the fervor and adoration of a royal prince.

At one o'clock the carriages begin to go to the Opera House. It is built on a hill—a short distance from the town—a square plain building of brick and stone, in which the stage occupies more room than the auditorium. It was built primarily for the production of opera rather than for hearing it. The orchestra and director are hidden from the audience beneath a large canopy in front of the stage, and can only be seen by the singers.

At four o'clock the trombones announce, with that German bugle-call which seems like an unfinished musical phrase, the time for beginning. The audience remain standing until the lights are lowered, and the clatter of seats being let down sounds like a volley of musketry—followed by a breathless silence in the darkness that is almost deathlike. A long pause, then the slow, sustained notes are heard with an ever-increasing crescendo.

The solemnity of the scene makes it seem like a service of worship. The chords gather tenderly and gently—then a crash, and the wild rush of passion, reminding one of the lonely forest scene, breathing and touching nature's own mantle. The peal of thunder, the roar of rushing waters, the gentle rustle of leaves, the gleam of peaceful sunlight, are all woven into a rich symphony.

My mind was taxed to keep close to those puzzling

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musical phrases, to know where to commence and finish a tone, or to hold the key given by the orchestra as they dashed on to the next movement. The cue to the note always seemed contrary to what was expected; to plunge into space for a perilous accidental—it required every nerve; but I loved it; it was exhilarating, and stimulated me to my best efforts.

My interpretation of Wagner's vocal score at last obtained the approval of the German critics who had been so severe in their previous criticisms.

My great musical ambition was now achieved, and I had conquered in my favorite *role*. Yet in the supreme moment, with encomiums of praise ringing in my ears, my heart ached with loneliness—the echo of that Minor Chord was still present. Elsa's plaintive feelings seemed my own.

Nearly every day I was visited by ambitious American girls asking me for advise as to a musical career. How I loved their bright fresh faces, and what pangs of regret I felt that they should desire to give up their young lives for fame, and sacrifice the contented serenity of happy wifehood and motherhood!

As if in contrast to these girls, a poor woman, once a famous stage celebrity—a popular *danseuse* in Paris—came to me for help. My heart bled for her; she reminded me of Lila and poor Mr. Bluffingame, and with Mrs. Campbell's help I did what I could for her.

The only relaxations from the serious atmosphere of that engagement were the visits of a young American newspaper man who came to interview me. He was rather homesick at first, and told me of his mother, and this touched my heart, and we became good friends

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at once. He recalled incidents in my career—the 'cooing-dove' passage in 'The Creation'—the red Elizabethan dress I wore at Chicago. He pleaded for 'features' to make his 'copy' bright and breezy; even asking me outright if I hadn't a love episode or two that I could spare, as he thought my stage biography was rather tame and abbreviated.

He little thought how his questions pained me; but his open, honest face reminded me of a brother at home, and I could not resent his curiosity.

'And you were never married?' he asked.

'I had rather say nothing. This printed slip contains my biography,' I replied, trying to evade his direct questions.

'But I want some fresh stuff. Surely you've had some love affairs—why, I've had seven already and I'm not married yet!'

The impudent little rascal! But his *naivete* fascinated me. As he left, he looked straight into my face and said:

'Madame Helvina, I adore you; but I shall have that love story yet.'

The festival passed like a dream, and Mrs. Campbell had taken such excellent care of me that I had not missed an engagement, and had only been in poor voice once or twice.

On the last day, as I gazed out of the dressing-room window at the throng of people gathered in front of the Opera House, and overlooking the beautiful valley, chequered with fields of ripening grain, I was sad, and could not help regretting that my work there was

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over. The Festival had been an inspiration to me that will last through life.

At dusk, the evening before I left Bayreuth, I visited for the first time the tomb of Richard Wagner. Enclosed by tall iron railings, was a simple mound of earth, surmounted by a plain slab of granite. On the four sides the ivy clambered as if to protect the silent sleeper. White lilies drooped their pure blossoms at each corner. The sun had sunk behind the Opera House, which seemed to be Richard Wagner's real monument. The twilight gathered softly, and I felt as if in a vast cathedral.

From this spot can be seen, through a thicket of small trees, the summer house in which he used to work. Their lengthening shadows seemed like silent sentinels in the watches of the night.

As I stood in meditation, the sky had clouded; suddenly, the lightning flashed, the rustle of leaves quickened with the stirring breeze, a crash of thunder pealed in terror as a climax, and died away with soft diminuendo down the valley. Here the great composer caught his inspiration, always in soulful communion with Nature. He caught the very breath of the whirlwind.

Great raindrops began to fall, and I reluctantly turned to leave with the *adagio finale* of 'Parsifal' coming to me faintly:—

'Beloved Saviour,
Blessed Redemption.'

He was at rest, and his heart's yearning was satisfied. The storm and tempests of mortal life had passed

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for ever, and he had joined in the heavenly symphonies, which have revealed the mysteries of earth.

'Speak no more of his renown,
Lay your earthly fancies down,
God accept him, Christ receive him!'

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CHAPTER XXXI.

'My dear Helvy, your position is secure. Three offers for engagements are here awaiting your acceptance,' said Howard as he entered my room hurriedly one morning.

'Where are they from, Howard?' I inquired eagerly.

'One from Paris, and one from New York——'

'And the third?'

'Mine,' he said laughing.

The silly fellow! he had proposed again, but I was becoming used to it.

'The third is out of the question, and I propose we go to Brussels as arranged.'

It was at Brussels that I met my old friend, Arundel Sunderland, the composer. We had formed a platonic friendship a year or so before. He was a charming man, a clever composer, and a bachelor well seasoned into the forties.

'I am so glad to see you,' he said, as we shook hands, 'and I hope I may see much of you during your stay here.'

Howard had arranged various interesting excursions for me, but he did not look very pleased when Arundel joined us nearly every day.

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'By the way, Madame Helvina,' said Arundel one day, 'I have just finished the score of my first grand opera, "Evangeline," and I have created the title-*role* for you. Will you honor me by undertaking the task?'

This was indeed gratifying to me. He described to me in detail the scene, the plot, and action, and whistled some of the arias to give me an idea of the theme, which made me eager to try it for myself.

Arundel was so absorbed in his work that he could think and talk of nothing else.

First impressions are difficult to dissipate. When I heard the opening measures of 'Evangeline' my opinion was formed. The harmony was certainly massive, but—could I tell him?—it was but an echo of Wagner with a reflection of Gounod's 'Romeo and Juliet.' The title-*role* was simply unsingable, and I tried my best to pour soul into it; but the opera was too much of a polished imitation of the great masters to give play for a finished and original conception. It lacked inspiration and continuity, and seemed more of a compilation of chords than a composition.

'How do you like it? he asked breathlessly, his black eyes sparkling.

'I have hardly given it a fair trial yet,' I replied, trying to evade the question.

'But you will help me to bring it out?'

'Thank you, I will try; and indeed I feel grateful to you for the honor you do me.'

'I had you in my mind, madame, as I wrote every measure.'

I hardly knew how to tell him the truth. In light opera he was clever, and a hard worker; and his

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triumph would undoubtedly come some day in grand opera, but it was hardly to be found in the score of 'Evangeline.'

I rehearsed and rehearsed, but it was of no use. It seemed like an operatic mill-stone. I tried to express this to him, but I could not make him understand.

'And you will take the title-*role*?' he persisted one day, after I had wearied myself with the unsingable score.

'I am afraid,' I said hesitatingly.

'Don't desert me now,' he pleaded, almost passionately.

'Well, I will do my best for you, but——'

'Many thanks for that kind assurance, Madame Helvina,' he replied. 'With you I know my opera will be safe.'

In a few weeks we were in the midst of the final rehearsals. Little do the public realize the immense amount of real hard work and drudgery required to stage a new opera.

The first night arrived.

The overture began. My nervousness increased, as even the opening song was unmanageable. The love-making of the first act passed off smoothly enough, excepting for a few blunders of the 'prop' man, and that when one of the 'boats' refused to float majestically the pit and gallery were amused. In the second act, during a pathetic search for missing Gabriel, I did try so hard to make music of the score, but just at the most unfortunate time the tenor broke on his high C and there was confusion. I rallied the chorus, on the *ensemble*, but felt that the opera had failed.

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With a flush of excitement Arundel came to me after the *finale*.

'Madame Heivina, I can never thank you enough; you have carried the opera,' and he led me before the curtain to receive the acknowledgments of the audience, who were indulging in the usual first-night applause.

But I felt that the opera was a failure.

The critics next morning thoroughly confirmed my fears; they said I was unequal to the *role*, and that my voice was rapidly failing. The opera had only a short run, as the managers were panic-stricken. It was rather an inglorious sequel to my Continental success.

Howard was furious, and had no sympathy for Arundel, who was rather crushed.

'I will make them regret it yet,' hissed Arundel. 'If it were not for you, I should not care, but you sacrificed yourself for me.'

'Oh no, no,' I protested. 'We must expect ups and downs and be ready to make sacrifices.'

'Would you make another sacrifice for me?'

'What is that?' I inquired.

'Will you be my wife? You surely intend to retire from the stage some day? Let us live together for the divine art, and——'

'It can never be,' I broke in excitedly.

This seemed to rather startle him.

'Why?'

'I shall never marry.'

'Let us always be friends, then,' he said softly, 'and forget what I have said.'

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'Thank you,' I replied; 'I cannot afford to lose my friends,' and I gave him my hand.

'You will remain my life's inspiration,' he said earnestly.

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CHAPTER XXXII.

DURING the following weeks I was quite surprised by a visit from the young American newspaper man whom I had met a Bayreuth.

'Madame Helvina, I've an awfully good love story, and——' he exclaimed as a greeting.

'Why, when did you arrive?'

'This morning, madame, and the article would be just right if you'd only allow me a wee bit of romance to work up. I can fix it. Please do.' His eyes danced with real delight and enthusiasm.

'No, my boy, my life is my own. You must not deceive——'

'Yes, but I've a corker—better than stolen diamonds—or getting married—or a divorce—it's a husband in the air!'

I paled under his glance. Did he know the real truth? I must know.

'What nonsense have you in your head now?' trying to speak unconcernedly. 'Come and have tea with me to-morrow, I cannot stay to talk now.'

After he had gone I wondered what had suggested the idea to him.

During this engagement the first real trouble between the rival prima donnas, of whom I was one,

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occurred. Quarrels behind the scenes may furnish good newspaper gossip, but to me they are most revolting, and I had hitherto successfully avoided them. The most insignificant trifles often lead to the most serious disputes.

'I will not sing with Helvina.' It was Marie Almster talking to the manager in my hearing. Hoping to avoid a quarrel, I paid no attention to her remarks. 'She has snubbed me, and has talked too much,' she continued.

'But you are not spiting her, but injuring me,' protested the manager.

'Well, you ought to know better than to sign with that American upstart. She thinks herself too fine, and comes of a low servant family.'

I could stand it no longer.

'The young lady will not have the opportunity of singing with me,' I interposed sarcastically.

'What! and you, too, Madame Helvina!' gasped the manager.

'Yes, I will sing an extra solo, and you can cut the duet in the concert programme.'

'But it will be too much of a strain on your voice,' he suggested.

'Never mind; the programme shall not suffer by this unfortunate affair.'

'This is not the end, Madame Helvina,' said the little German lady, looking at me fiercely.

It was only an ordinary stage quarrel, but somehow the threat of Marie Almster worried me.

The events of the day had put me in a most miserable frame of mind, and when I arrived home a cable-

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gram was handed me. Another offer for an American engagement! thought I, as I tore it open, but instead of that, the cruel message met my eyes:

'Tod died this morning—buried Wednesday.

MAXWELL.'

As the broken arc ot the little home circle appeared to me in my grief, empty and vain seemed my struggle for fame. Tod, Tod! how his face haunted me, as I lingered in memory over the last time I had seen him!

I longed to be at home to comfort mother in her deep sorrow.

'No,' came the cruel demands of business. 'Your engagements must be fulfilled.'

Only a few hours alone to mourn a dead brother in a distant land! How every scene at that death-bed was pictured, and how vividly it brought back memories of little Joe—one more grave on the hill!

My eyes, red from weeping, were covered with powder that night as I threw myself into my task with an aching heart.

The minor passages were in tune with my heart, as in fancy I was back in that grief-stricken household.

My lips were sealed to all but Mrs. Campbell, who had indeed proved herself a true 'mother' to a wandering singer, and had decided to travel with me.

'I must return to America at once, Howard,' I said one day.

'My dear Helvy, we are just on the point of sign-

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ing the greatest contract you have ever had. Surely——'

'Howard, I must go,' I said firmly.

'That's the way it goes!' he said in a disappointed tone of voice. 'One can never reckon on women.'

I was determined. It was one of those times when we feel that the whole world is as nothing compared with our loved ones.

'Very well, then, we'll sail next week,' he finally assented.

The last evening I appeared in opera before sailing Marie Almster sang with me. In a quarrel scene she actually became in earnest and bit my arm savagely. I screamed out in pain (and it was not a musical note either), and rushed off the stage. The director was thunderstruck, and it looked as if the opera would fall in a crash during that duet. Gene Paroski, who sang that night, was waiting his cue in the wing, and saw what had happened and took in the situation at a glance. He hurried on before his cue, and the director, seeming to divine his motive, held up the orchestra to finish a phrase, and gave the signal for the opening bars of Gene's aria. While the orchestra were finding their places he kept a single violin playing an impromptu interlude. Madame Almster stood as if dazed when Gene made his unexpected appearance, but, as if it had been a part of the 'business,' he unceremoniously dragged her from the stage.

She had evidently deliberately planned to mar the performance and injure my musical reputation.

Once in the dressing-room she was furious and raved like a mad woman.

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'I hate her! I hate her!' I heard her shriek.

Fortunately her understudy, who resembled her somewhat, and was available, completed the few remaining numbers after a hasty make-up.

But I was not so fortunate, and with my arm stinging with pain I was compelled to continue. I never heard Gene Paroski sing better, and his tender sympathizing looks were very consoling as I threw myself into his arms in earnest, as if for protection.

The audience, little realizing the tempest raging behind the scenes, gave us the most enthusiastic reception of the season.

Gene Paroski and I had a longer talk than usual that night.

'When did you notice anything wrong to-night?' I asked.

'Not until she bit you,' he replied. 'Her face looked like that of a maniac, and I was determined to stop her and save the opera, if I had to fling her into the pit.'

It was a nine days' sensation in operatic circles, but blew over without an open scandal.

The preparations for returning to America proceeded rapidly, and among the trophies which I carried back was a street piano organ—a hurdy-gurdy. I had become quite fascinated with them in London and on the Continent, where my morning slumber was broken by the refrain of 'After the Ball,' 'Two Little Girls in Blue,' and so forth—the popular American music. I must confess these airs had a piquant charm about them for me after a concentrated study of Wagner's music.

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'Howard, I want a hurdy-gurdy to take back to America,' I had said one day.

He was greatly astonished.

'There is no explaining these women,' he muttered. But he bought the hurdy-gurdy.

As I stood upon the deck of the steamer which was about to sail, Hal Cogswell, the irrepressible young American I had met at Bayreuth, came running up the gangway.

'Deny it—deny it—a lie and a slander! Sue them, or I'll kill them!' he exclaimed excitedly in a low tone to me.

'You are excited; what is it?' I asked.

'Read this,' he exclaimed, as he handed me a newspaper and pointed to a marked paragraph.

It was one of those cheap publications, edited by a masculine 'Lady Sneerwell,' whose specific object is to probe into the privacy of home, and retail blackmail and scandal.

I read:

'IT LOOKS STRANGE.'

'Madame Helvina's sudden departure for America, after signing contracts for numerous engagements, occasions considerable speculation in theatrical circles. Some intimate that her managers are fearful of their bargain, and ask to be released, because her voice is failing and her acting lacks the fire and vivacity of youth; others assert that there is a scandal with the tenor, and that they are going to be married in America as soon as he secures his divorce. Madame Helvina has a large circle of admirers, who will regret this cloud upon her artistic career.'

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During the whole of my life this was the first time a suspicion had been breathed against my character. That was the one thing I held dearer than life. It had been burned into my very soul by mother—without chastity, a woman is not a woman; without purity, a woman is nothing.

'Who could have been so cruel and malicious?' I said, with tears in my eyes.

'I suspect Almster,' said Hal, 'and if you will give me authority, I will make her weep tears of blood for this cowardly trick,' he continued, warmly.

'Hal, you are a good boy,' I said, giving him my hand.

'And you're my queen, Madame Helvina. I'm hanged if I don't feel like fighting a duel with the cowardly editor.

'Don't be rash, my boy——'

'Rash! no, but I'm going to stay here a month longer and see this thing through.'

The bell sounded an interruption.

'Good-bye, Hal,' I said, looking into his earnest boyish face.

'Good-bye. Remember you've got a friend in me forever,' he said, as he hurried through the surging crowd. The last I saw of him, he was waving the Stars and Stripes from among the throng on the pier.

The old tremor of the Minor Chord crept upon me. My enemies now sought my character! Joy and grief—sorrow and happiness—they mingle together in the same breath!

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CHAPTER XXXIII.

'I MUST have another week's holiday alone,' I said to Howard, the day we reached Chicago.

He seemed to suspect that there was a secret, but dear Mrs. Campbell satisfied his curiosity in some way, and he grumbled an assent.

How consoling it was to feel my mother's thin and trembling arms about my neck as we buried our faces in each other's shoulders and wept for Tod, after my arrival home.

No caress like that of a mother, even to a mature woman!

Together we visited the new mound of yellow earth still wet with the tears of grief. I could scarcely realize that Tod was lying beneath it, and it was also the first time I had seen the grave of little Joe since his burial.

'I visited all the scenes of childhood, and Angela's grave at the old limekiln.

'Where is Tim? Is he alive?'

Mother seemed to anticipate the inquiry.

'Yes, but he is a wreck—an invalid—and his children are so devoted to him! Will you see him? He sits every afternoon in his chair under the maples, where you children used to play.'

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We went across the street. A little, curly, golden-haired daughter, the very image of Tim, wheeled him out in his chair. His face was pale and wan, and yet how spiritual! The curls were gone, but grey hairs showed against the little velvet cap he wore. The fire of youth's ambition was quenched; a peaceful, pallid face, waiting for death!

His countenance brightened with that familiar old smile as we approached.

'Oh, its Mrs. Maxwell, I know. How kind of you! But who's——'

'It's Minza, Tim!' I cried, going towards him.

He did not seem to recognize me. He turned towards me.

'Don't you know me, Tim?' I continued.

'Minza, bright little Minza!' he cried. 'God bless you! Come nearer and let me touch you.'

'Here I am, Tim,' I said, taking his hand. 'Why don't you look at me?'

'Haven't they told you, Minza?'

'Told me what?'

'I am blind now, and can never see you again.'

What a shock his words gave me! I kneeled, and he placed his hands on my head.

'Such pretty hair it used to be, Minza!'

Blind! O love of my childhood, how my heart pitied him!

His affliction obliterated the memory of our last meeting, and I could only remember the Tim of my youth. There was the old familiar wave of the hand, the twitch of the brow, that even time and trouble had not effaced.

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It was touching to see how dependent he was on the two children who remained at home, while the elder struggled to earn a living to support her blind father.

Mother left us talking happily together under the maples, and when I returned to her she told me the pathetic story of how Tim had lost his sight.

After the death of Angela he was ill for some time, and he made a desperate effort to conquer his appetite for drink. He was successful, but scarcely had that dark cloud disappeared when his sight was threatened. In spite of all that the most eminent oculists could do, he returned home—just one year after Angela's death, hopelessly blind.

He had paid a heavy penalty for those years of dissipation.

Zella, the eldest daughter, was employed in a large town near as a typewriter and clerk. They expected her home the next day. Her father was very proud of her, and even my brother Jim sang her praises to me.

'Zella is so like you,' said Tim to me one day. 'She is a good girl and ambitious to be somebody. She's always sending me pretty things and money. She receives a splendid salary.'

Zella came home the following day, but, oh—can I tell it?—she came home with a secret. To mother and me she told the sad story. A generous employer indeed! But he had demanded his price! A motherless girl had been his prey! Ruin and disgrace were the penalty she had to pay.

The village was shocked and scandalized. Parents

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forbade their children to play with the little Rathbone girls.

We kept Tim in ignorance, and brave little mother faced the storm of indignation and was a mother to the motherless girl in disgrace.

The afternoon before I was to leave, as my extended holiday was nearly over, I was reading to Tim under the old maples, wondering how the sad news could be broken to him.

Suddenly he stopped me. 'Minza, tell me,' he said, 'what has been going on lately, and why is Zella not with me more? She is not always at home, and now she is here I scarcely hear anything of her.'

I held my breath, hardly knowing what to say.

Just then an infant's wail was heard from our house across the street. His blind eyes seemed to pierce me.

'Tell me, Minza, tell me—don't take advantage of Tim because he is blind !—is it your child?'

'No, Tim,' I replied huskily, 'it's only a little stranger.'

'Poor little thing, poor little thing!' he murmured. 'And how did it come to your house?'

'Zella—brought—it—it——'

'What!' he broke in, jumping to his feet and his face flashing as if he grasped the whole truth. 'What!' he repeated.

'My Zella—oh, I suspected that you were hiding something from me! My God! don't tell me it's true. My little Zella!' and he fell back into his chair still calling for Zella.

A pale face stood at the door. It was Zella.

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'Father, father!' she called, sobbing bitterly, 'don't! Zella has come home to stay for ever.'

'Yes, but that scoundrel! Will he escape all punishment? I'll——'

'Tim, Tim,' I said, trying to soothe him, 'you are blind.'

'Yes, I was blind. If I had only known! Better to have starved than this! Yes, I am helpless, I am blind.'

'Tim, I must command,' I said; 'you are not strong enough to work yourself into such a passion.'

'Work myself!' he moaned. 'My God! will my retribution never end? Oh, Zell, Zell, my little girl, my motherless daughter! Your blind father is such a burden and so helpless, but he loves his little girls.'

Just then a radiant smile of love overspread that face, the calm after the storm, and I left father and daughter sobbing together.

The next day, when I went to bid Tim good-bye, I found him in his usual place with the tiny infant in his arms. I could hardly repress my feelings as I kissed him.

'You will come back, won't you, Minza?' he pleaded, and his sightless blue eyes glistened. 'You will come back, I know you will.'

I kissed the unconscious baby and left him.

'Mother, I cannot help it, my heart is breaking! Would it be right?—dare I love him?' I sobbed. How good it seemed to confide in mother!

'But, my dear, there's Bob. You do not know. Be brave, my girl, and be true to your vows.'

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'Yes, yes! But surely he would have come before this, if he were alive?'

'But we cannot tell; wait and see.'

The old heartache came back. In the zenith of fame, the music of my life was still in a Minor Key.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

WHEN I returned to Chicago I had quite made up my mind that my duty as a daughter was paramount to my career as a prima donna.

'It must by my farewell tour,' I said firmly to Howard.

'But, Helvy, they will laugh and make sport of you. The newspapers will take it up as a joke.'

'I do not care,' I said defiantly. 'I owe a duty to my——' I stopped suddenly.

'To whom?' he asked, growing interested.

'My parents,' I replied.

'Why, Helvy, you never told me about them. Now, put aside that nonsense and make hay while the sun shines. It is for your interest as well as——'

'No,' I broke in. 'I must retire. Blood is thicker than salaries. Besides, the conductor's *baton* has become to me a black demon. I walk, move, and breathe under its magic spell on the stage and forget my duty as a daughter.'

'But the worst is now over. We could give concert tours.'

'Yes; but, as in the opera, one false move, one breath wrong, and the orchestra are chasing away

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with the thread of harmony snapped. The flash of the wand has become so irksome to me that I fear I shall lose my mind if I continue.'

'Oh, no—tut, tut,' he said sympathetically. 'You need rest, then you will be all right. I had arranged for four seasons ahead.'

The stage had suddenly grown repulsive to me. The atmosphere of the dressing-room was oppressive, with its dark make-up for Carmen; the white bottles and blonde braided wigs for Elsa and Marguerite; they all seemed like heavy armor to a worn and weary knight. Besides, the recent events at home had unsettled me. Mother and father were growing old, and I felt that I owed a duty to them, and ought to give up my selfish ambitions. I tried to get them to accompany me.

'No, Minza, we used to do it when you and mother gave your concerts, but we are too old now,' said father.

I thought that my determination was fixed when we started on that farewell tour and I bade farewell to the old familiar scenes in the opera houses we visited. But we had not been out many weeks before that determination was changed. My old rival, Almster, was making a tour of America in light opera. She was having good success, had had her diamonds stolen, had been married several times, and the newspapers bristled with spicy items about her.

Howard had evidently been studying womankind, and kept me thoroughly posted. It was irritating, and yet I wanted to read it. One day, as if in triumph, he brought me a paper. 'Read that!' he shouted.

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It was an interview with Almster, giving her opinion of Madame Helvina, and it was not a very flattering one either.

She stated:

'Poor Helvina is now on her farewell tour. She is nearly sixty years of age, and a grandmother. She bears her age remarkably well, but her voice is not what it has been; even prima donnas must grow old.'

There was a sting in this that nettled me, and the old spirit of spite and rivalry once more asserted itself.

'Howard, have all the bills changed, and take off that farewell tour line. I intend to remain on earth a little longer.'

Howard was in high glee, and gave me a brotherly managerial kiss. 'Bless you! Helvy, you're a trump, and a sensible woman after all!'

'Well, I've decided,' I replied.

'We'll show that fussy little busybody yet!' he said defiantly as he left.

Just then it flashed upon me that Howard was the author of that interview. But I could not change my mind again.

During my entire stage career I had always made a practice of attending church on Sunday morning, if possible, and had hitherto always received comfort and help from the service; I often worshipped, quite unrecognized, with members of my audience of the night previous.

In one city, the minister somehow discovered that I would be among his congregation. The hymns were old favorites of mine, and carried me back to that little Methodist church in Iowa. I was a trifle

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drowsy, and did not listen particularly to the text, but I was soon quite aroused by the most blatant, ignorant, and cruel raillery against opera singers and stage people that I had ever heard.

'They are enemies of Christ, and agents of the devil,' he shouted, pounding the desk, and looking about as if to catch the eye of his victim. My heart was in my mouth, but I tried to look unconcerned. 'They ensnare the young with insidious temptations, and are stepping-stones to the worst species of infamy and vice.' Once more he turned in my direction, but did not seem to recognize me. Blessed blonde wig! No one knew me, although his remarks were personally directed against Madame Helvina.

The prima donna was not converted, and his congregation did not look altogether pleased, but they dared not talk back.

This was his message of love! I believe that those who did not go to operas as a rule were present the following nights to see for themselves how the devil acted on state occasions. The newspapers took the matter up, and scorched the poor minister until, I confess, I felt sorry for him.

'Ah, that sermon was a clever hit,' said Howard, rubbing his hands. 'Standing room only for six successive nights, thanks to the reverend spouter.'

'Perhaps he has never been in an opera house, Howard.'

'Well, I'll send him a ticket. Helvy, you're a brick. This season has been a corker—the best we've ever had.'

The chorus girls were indignant, and pouted their

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pretty painted lips in talking of the sermon. My life's aim had always been to keep my character pure and wholesome. There may be black spots in my profession, as there are in others, but evil will never be remedied by raillery and abuse.

Soon after this I received a letter from a firm of lawyers in Chicago, stating that, if I made affidavits affirming specific knowledge of the death of Robert Burnette, they would secure the insurance money due on his life.

The name of the firm was Connor and Cogswell, and Hal had evidently been metamorphosed into a lawyer. I remembered his remarks on previous occasions, and wondered if he knew the real truth. Would my real history be revealed to the world?

I wrote, stating that I held no proofs of my husband's death, and signed for the first time in many years my real name, 'Minza Burnette.'

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CHAPTER XXXV.

WHAT secrets and joys the telegraph operators could reveal if they fully realized the meaning of the dots and dashes as they flash from their fingers! The messages of lightning in these days form great links in human destiny.

In the midst of our triumphal tour on the Pacific coast, when there appeared to be a rift in the clouds of my life, I received a telegram:—

'Father is very ill. Come quickly.—Mother.'

All my dates were cancelled, and the suspense of that journey home I can never forget. The surging crowds in a railway train seldom think of the various emotions mingled with its roar, and the heavy hearts reflected in the sad eyes steeped in tears. Should I reach home for a last look? Perhaps it was not so bad, after all.

All was still and quiet about the house as I entered —not a sound.

'Father, father!' I cried.

My only answer was mother's sobs as she met me, and her weeping eyes first told the story.

'Minza, he is dead,' she said between her sobs.

Dead! My heart rebelled against God.

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I went into the darkened room and kissed that cold face. The faces of Tod and baby Joe looked down upon me in that dear old parlor—the room of the dead. Brother Jim was there; and so strong and manly! The great bereavement had made the boy a man at once.

At the funeral, when the soft notes of 'Just as I Am, Without One Plea,' father's favorite hymn, burst forth, I completely broke down. The weak, trembling, and aged voice of the minister, dear old Mr. Frazer, tried to console our grief-stricken hearts.

The Grand Army of the Republic, the Masons in their regalia and white gloves, gathered to do honor to a dead comrade. The last said rites were over, and never will the soft minor refrain of Pleyel's hymn, sung by the Masons in a husky voice as they marched round the grave, fade from my memory. The final burial salute was fired by the old army comrades.

'Farewell, father, farewell!' I cried, as the smoke of the volley rolled away.

Who does not remember that vacant place at the head of the table, that empty chair at the fireside, that absent voice?

'Mother, we must go away to-morrow,' I said, a few days after the funeral.

'My dear, I am too old; don't tear me away from my loved ones. While I live I want to be near my boys and Robert.'

'But, mother, you have the living to look after. Jim is going to finish at college, and you must go with me.'

'O Minza! let us give up the struggle for ambition

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that I taught you, and live with our dead. You do not know how I loved your father. My heart is—is ——' She quite broke down.

'Yes; but, mother, we must face life as it is.'

'My brave daughter, you seem determined. Do as you think best.'

It was indeed affecting when we closed the old home and turned the key in the door. The old maples sighed; the hammock swung sadly under the evergreens; it was autumn again.

A last glance at the window across the way, and I saw Zella standing by her father's side. Poor blind Tim could not see us, but his hand waved a farewell; and we began life over again—mother and I.

It was scarcely six months after we left the old home when I noticed mother was failing, but I felt no serious alarm, as she did not complain.

One night, when I had returned rather late from the opera, she fell in a faint. A doctor was called, but still I felt no particular anxiety, as I had nursed her through these faints many times before. But, as the unconsciousness continued, the doctor's face became very grave. Suddenly the sleeper awoke, and began singing in a weak, trembling voice,

> 'There is a land that is fairer than day,
> And by faith we can see it afar.'

'Mother, mother,' I broke in, 'you must not exert yourself so much.'

There was a strange light in her eyes, and again she became drowsy and unconscious.

'O, doctor, doctor! do something—do something! to help her,' I pleaded.

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Howard was called and the breath came faster and faster. The livid lips turned purple, and responded but feebly to my impulsive kiss. She looked so pleadingly into my face with those deep blue eyes as the death-light glowed in them!

'She is dying!' I cried.' 'Mother, mother, don't leave Minza. Oh, doctor, she must not die, she must not die!'

'We can do nothing now,' he replied gently.

'Good-bye, Minza,' she said almost in a whisper, as I bent over her to catch the words. 'Good-bye, my child; remember—remember——'

Again she sang in a feebler voice,

'There is a land——'

The line was never finished; a deep breath, and I was motherless. A clock in the distance struck three, as a knell for the dead.

I was stunned and bewildered, and Howard seemed cruel in coming to me for directions. They kept me away from my dead. No sleep could I bring to my eyes; even tears would not flow; and hour by hour the terrible realization grew upon me—mother was gone.

Preparations were made to take her remains home the following day, and the night before, I stole into the room of the dead; the wearied watcher having fallen asleep in an adjoining corridor.

The flickering shadows of the lowered gas seemed to give life to the sleeping face, but when I kissed her ice-cold lips the truth came to me—I was alone with mother, but she was dead, and I had torn her from her home!

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All at once the tension in my brain gave way, and I felt that I was mad. Let them bury two bodies in that little Iowa cemetery, and let me sleep with mother. I would end my existence. On the mantelpiece I saw several bottles labelled 'Poison,' which had been left by the undertaker. Surely one would serve my purpose? I held up one of them to the first streak of dawn as it pierced the closed shutters, when the door opened softly and Howard came in. He started when he saw me.

'Helvy, Helvy, what are you doing here?' he said.

I shrank back.

'I, too, grew to love her as mother; let me grieve with you. But what's this?' he said quickly, taking the bottle out of my had.

'O Howard! I cannot live now; let me die,' I pleaded.

'Die! Live, Helvy, live! What would *she* say?' he said, pointing to her peaceful form.

He had touched the right chord, and tears came to my relief.

'She is an angel now, Helvy,' he continued, 'and I never knew a mother's love—was always alone.'

His words touched me, and we wept together.

Even now I dare not linger over memories of mother's funeral. It seems to tear my very soul and threaten my reason.

Jim had only been married a few weeks and was there with his pretty wife, but they were wrapped up in each other, which made me feel my bitter loneliness

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more keenly. Even in the great hour of grief, brother and sister seemed to have drifted apart.

My future was a blank. I felt as though I could not tear myself away from that new-made grave, and the holy benediction of my mother's love which hung over it.

Here some day I too will lie, to complete the broken arc of the family circle.

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CHAPTER XXXVI.

On my return from one of these visits to the cemetery I found Hal Cogswell waiting for me at the gate.

'Madame Helvina, I am so sorry, so sorry for you!' and tears stood in his eyes. 'Our mothers are the best friends we have, after all.'

My only answer was a sob.

'I have known the secret of your life, Madame Helvina, since we met in Europe; and your kindness to me made me resolve to help you, and I've found him.'

'Who?' I asked listlessly.

'Why, Bob Burnette,' he replied.

I shivered.

'Don't you want to hear of your hus——

'My husband!' I moaned.

When we were in the house he told me the story.

In a secluded mad-house in Germany, Hal believed he had found poor Bob.

'Yes, there is no doubt of it, Madame Helvina. I came upon it quite accidentally while reading an official report of the patients. This poor fellow was found near a collapsed balloon, a raving maniac. Although

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he mumbles in German, there is no doubt in my mind that he is your husband.'

'Yes, but how do you know?' I inquired, growing interested.

'Because the keepers told me he constantly repeats one name, "Minza, Minza," and talks of balloons.'

My poor Bob!

'And is there any hope?'

'No, I am afraid not; but if you will allow me I will secure the necessary papers, and bring him home.'

'My duty as a wife demands it, and I feel you are a friend, Hal.'

I decided there and then that he should be furnished with funds and should fetch my mad husband home to me.

'Will you go with me to see a blind friend?' I said after we had finished our talk.

'With pleasure,' he said enthusiastically.

We went across the street, and he took poor Tim's hands and spoke very tenderly of his affliction.

'Well, it's worth losing your eyes to have such a friend as Madame——'

I hushed him. 'My name is Minza,' I whispered.

'Yes, Minza,' he echoed.

Just then Zella came out. I had heard of love at first sight, and surely it was before me!

'Zella, Zella, you here!' said Hal, going towards her to shake hands.

'This is my home, Hal, and this is my father,' she responded, pointing to Tim.

Evidently they were acquainted; it was not love at first sight, after all.

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They soon forgot Tim and me. After a time Zella left Hal's side and beckoned me to come with her into the house, leaving Hal with Tim.

'He must know the truth. Will you tell him?' she asked me.

'Why, dear? He hasn't asked you to marry him, has he?'

'No, but—but—he might,' she said, blushing. 'And—and—he must know all. We met when I first went to the city, before—before——' she said, sobbing.

'But your secret is buried in that tiny grave?'

'Yes, I know; but he must and shall be told if I have to tell him myself.'

That evening I told Hal the sad story, expecting that it would end all between them, and watched his face closely for a response.

'Madame Helvina, that girl shall be my wife. I wondered what was on her mind this afternoon. Ever since we first met she has been my cherished sweetheart. I thank you, Madame Helvina, for telling me the truth; it has made me deeper in love than ever.'

. . . . . .

Hal left on his mission, and I returned to Howard to complete my broken engagements and continue my operatic career.

After mother's death, Howard was specially kind and thoughtful of me! As a man, he never seemed so great to me before. More fresh traits in his character showed themselves in those few days of grief and sorrow than in all the previous years of our acquaintance. He was so patient with me in all my whims,

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and so tender in alluding to dear mother, and even wore her sweet likeness on the inside cover of his watch.

'Now, Helvy, I will not bother you any more with love pleadings; I am simply your manager, and you are the only woman I have ever had to obey—or ever will, and when my dear says the word we will be married.'

'But, Howard, you do not understand. It can never be. I'm—I'm—married!'

'What?' he exclaimed, his face paling. 'And not let me know? Oh, Helvy, Helvy, how could you?'

'Howard, I was married before I knew you,' I replied, and I told him the story of poor Bob.

'Brave little woman!' he exclaimed when I had finished. 'And that young rascal of a Hal has gone to bring you back an insane husband! But, Helvy, you know his insanity releases you.'

'Legally, it may, but morally, it does not. Howard, I am a wife.'

'I respect your convictions; but, Helvy, you are wearing yourself out with needless troubles. You have enough real grief without adding to it. Let me —let me——'

'The standing offer, Howard,' I broke in, trying to smile.

'Now that I know the real truth, I think I can be a better friend, although I may never be your husband.'

'We'll seal the compact,' I said, taking both his hands in mine, and we stood looking into each other's eyes, as we had never looked before.

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Some months afterwards I received the first letter from Hal:

'I swore I would not write to you until my mission was accomplished,' he wrote. 'You have no idea of the Governmental red tape to be gone through to extradite an insane man. They want his pedigree back several generations, and yours as well. I fixed one up for you, with dates and ancestors that may surprise you, but you will have to swear to it all now, or I shall be in a pickle. We sail on the 16th inst. I have visited your husband several times, and the poor fellow keeps on moaning "Minza, Minza," so plaintively.'

I had made arrangements with a private asylum in Iowa for my husband's safe keeping, and could scarcely await the time for his arrival.

We were to take a holiday—Howard and I—a holiday to meet my mad husband.

On the day the steamer arrived in New York, Hal telegraphed to us when to meet them at the station in the little Iowa town where the asylum was situated. They did not arrive in the train we had expected them by, and we returned to the hotel feeling somewhat anxious.

An hour later there was a knock at the door of my room. It was Hal, who appeared unannounced, as handsome and enthusiastic as ever.

'We are here,' he whispered. 'Be brave, Madame Helvina, be brave.'

The suspense was at an end, and I was to meet my lost husband.

He was then in a room at that very hotel. Two

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stalwart Germans stood outside in the dark corridor as I approached with Hal and opened the door of the room.

There he was, crouching in the corner, eating his dinner like a wild beast. This my husband! His mad eyes looked up—a strange, unfamiliar look it was. What a greeting for man and wife after twelve years' parting! He rose to his feet. How tall and towering he seemed as the light from the little window shone full on his face!

'My God!' I shrieked.

I could not be mistaken. It was not Bob.

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CHAPTER XXXVII.

HOWARD and Hal rushed into the room at my shriek, fearing that something had happened.

I did not know whether to be happy or sad, but Hal was quite crushed. After so much expense and work, the madman proved to be the wrong man; but Howard looked relieved. The only explanation we could offer was that this poor madman was Bob's companion, and that it was the name of the ill-fated balloon which he moaned so continuously. But where, then, was Bob? I was still to be left in uncertainty, and the unfortunate man was taken back to Germany.

I tried to console Hal in his disappointment, but he was morbid, and soon after left us rather suddenly, leaving no address.

I was considerably surprised, therefore, to receive the following note some weeks after:—

'Dear Madame Helvina:—Will you and Mr. Wittaker attend our wedding?—Smithville, Dec. 16th —Zella and I.

'HAL.'

It was an abrupt wedding invitation, unique in its way, and altogether a surprise.

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. Howard and I made arrangements to go, taking Mrs. Campbell with us.

When we arrived home I insisted on driving at once to mother's grave. The four mounds looked very peaceful under a mantle of pure white snow. That cemetery was sacred ground to me.

Tears! Oh, how I wish there were some other way to express grief! I am tired of tears, but still they are the great expression of sorrow which divides humanity from the brute creation.

I gave a lingering look as we left that little city of the dead.

'Helvy, you are wearing yourself away, brooding so continually over death. You must think more of life,' said Howard as we left.

'How can I?' I echoed. 'My life is attuned to the Minor Chord of Death and Grief.'

'Oh, that's superstitious, my dear,' said Mrs. Campbell. 'Howard is quite right, you must arouse yourself to real life again.'

There was something refreshing and stimulating in meeting those two young lovers who were so soon to be man and wife. Their happiness was infectious. Zella was prettier than ever. The dead past had been buried.

Tim was happy, and cheerfully announced: 'You see, Minza, I give up my daughter, but I get back a son. And oh, Minza, they are so happy, together; it quite reminds me of our——'

'Hush, now, you should not be telling secrets,' I said hastily.

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Howard had heard it, and naturally put two and two together.

'And so you two were lovers in days gone by?' he inquired.

'In a way,' I answered, trying to change the subject. 'By the way, have you seen to the minister's carriage and the flowers, Howard?'

'I think so—or Mrs. Campbell has.'

The two younger girls, Helen and Jessie, had come home from the Music College they were attending for the wedding, which was to take place that evening. The service was short and simple. Hal and Zella stood beneath a bower of flowers close to Tim. The bride in her beauty reminded me of Angela—sister of my childhood—and it brought tears to my eyes to think that poor blind Tim could not see his sweet-faced child. The bridegroom seemed to realize the solemnity of the occasion, and repeated his responses several times, as if to emphasize the fact that he was being married in earnest; he nearly upset our gravity.

After the final words had been spoken, I was more cheerful; I began to feel that life was not so gloomy, after all, and I played the Wedding March from 'Lohengrin.' What a happy feast was that wedding supper!

Tim was placed at the head of the table, with Zella and Hal on one side, and myself and Howard on the other. It touched us all to see how tenderly the bride waited on and anticipated every want of her blind father, and to think that possibly it was our last meal together.

The young couple left for their new home in Chi-

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cago, where Hal persisted in calling himself a lawyer. Mrs. Campbell had taken charge of all the arrangements for the wedding in her kind, motherly way, and as she was growing old, and the incessant traveling was telling upon her, she decided to remain at my old home at Smithville, and look after Tim and his girls.

'Dear auntie,' I said fondly, kissing her, 'how can I ever thank you?'

'Dinna try it, my bairn,' she answered, adding with a twinkle: 'You will not need me always.'

'Yes, I shall,' I insisted.

'Well, well, we shall see,' she replied, as she left the room. But she had her own way.

'Now that was a pretty little wedding,' said Howard as we went home together. 'Wasn't it Helvy? And it put another idea into my head.'

'What is that?' I asked with a yawn.

'You would look so charming going through the same ceremony, with——'

'But, Howard, how can you ask me when——' I broke in.

'My dear, I must insist; you are unreasonable. There is no doubt whatever that Bob is either insane or dead, and you are free to marry anybody you like —even me, for instance.'

'Howard, I have a conscience', I said.

'Yes, and I have a love which——'

'Howard, you are forgetting our compact.'

'Bother the compact! I was a fool to make it; you keep me at arm's length, and only use me as a business

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machine. I shan't be able to stand it much longer. If you only loved——'

'Howard, I do love you, if I know what love is, but duty——' I said, going toward him and placing my hands on his shoulder.

The confession seemed to electrify him—and it relieved me.

'You mean it?' he exclaimed.

'Yes, but we cannot marry! My life echoes from a Minor Chord! I am a wife until I am proved to be a widow.'

We said 'Good-night' rather soberly for lovers, but we perfectly understood one another.

That night I dreamed I was singing in the heavenly choir. The harps and the lyres thrummed out in delicious harmony, and there was no need for a conductor's *baton*. Each one sang of his own life. Some were light and merry; others were sad and mournful, and sang in plaintive tones. The last chord always sealed the fate of the singer—the vigorous major resounded a reward of peace, joy, and happiness; the weird minor echoed grief, pain, and sorrow.

My turn had come. What would that chord strike?

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CHAPTER XXXVIII.

My dream had affected me very much, and it haunted me all the next day.

Howard came down from the hotel to tell me that he would have to return that evening, but that I could remain a month longer if I so desired.

A month alone without Howard! It was a dreary contemplation.

Just then a letter was brought me. It was from Arundel Sunderland, and read as follows:—

'My dear Madame Helvina:—I have just composed a new song, of which you are the heroine and your life its inspiration. I have dedicated it to you, and hoping you will pardon my seeming presumption, and that we may soon see you again in London,

I remain, sincerely your friend,

'ARUNDEL.

'P. S.—I send a copy of the song by this post.'

'And has the song arrived?' asked Howard, when he had read the letter.

'No but I'm dying to hear it,' I said quite excitedly.

'Oh, so am I,' said Howard rather sarcastically. 'It's sure to be good if its Arundel's. I fancy I can

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see him here with his single eye-glass glaring at you like a one-eyed owl.'

I could not help smiling a little at Howard's odd comparison.

'Well, I know it does not strike a Minor Chord, anyway,' he went on.

'How do you know, Howard?' I asked.

'I do not know positively, but I feel it; besides, I am told——'

'Well, here's the song,' I broke in, as a roll was handed to me by Helen, who had just returned from the post.

As I took it, my dream flashed into my mind, and connected itself with the letter from Arundel. An idea occurred to me. I would let this decide my destiny. Turning to Howard, I said:

'Howard, the last chord in this song shall tell me how my life is to continue. If its last chord trembles with the plaintive minor, my life must continue as it is; if it resounds with the hope and bouyancy of the major, I will do as you ask me, and marry you.'

'Glory be to the Chord!' he exclaimed enthusiastically, embracing me passionately.

'But remember,' I said, drawing myself away, 'I am superstitious, and I am in earnest. If that last chord is a minor, my life must continue as it is—I will never marry.'

'But it won't be, Helvy. It's a major blooming with orange blossoms, you bet!' he said confidently.

How little Arundel Sunderland dreamed he was deciding my destiny when he penned that last chord!

I called to Helen and Jessie, who were at the piano

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in the adjoining room, and, tearing off the wrapper, handed them the sheet of music.

'Girls, will you play and sing this for me? I do not think you will find it difficult,' I said, kissing them both.

It was in the early afternoon twilight of a dull December day that my future life was determined.

Howard and I sat without a light in the dear old parlor, which had seen so much of my grief and sorrow. The loved faces of my lost ones looked down on us from the walls, and in the flickering reflection of the fire, mother seemed to smile a blessing.

Howard took my hands as the first soft bass notes of the prelude came from the next room under Helen's delicate touch, which reminded me of mother's playing. The opening phrase awoke sad memories of my life.

Jessie's sweet voice began softly chanting in response to the weird harmony. Those happy innocent girls little thought that they held my future in the balance. The crescendo increased as the tempo quickened and the key changed. Howard and I rose together as if under a magic spell. His face grew strained and serious; he, too, was affected, by the suspense.

Minor strains mingled with the major in beautiful symphony, as if in benediction; the climax was approaching measure by measure, with impressive chords, on to the high note in which all the accumulated passion of the song was gathered. They had reached the closing retard, and the long-sustained tones were soothing me, until I remembered my vow.

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My heart almost stood still, and my nerves thrilled and tingled as the singer's last note died away. Helen was about to strike the last chord——

'O Helen, Helen!' I screamed.

The chord was struck!

FINALE.

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